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The Lesson from Iran: How the 'Warning Signs of Fundamentalism' Were Ignored

Introductory note

In this paper I examine the engagement of Iranian women with the 'fundamentalist' ideologies and policies that dominated the early Islamic Republic, and I explore the lessons that this engagement has to offer. I ask two questions. First, why and how did Iranian women and the secular forces fail to see the 'warning signs of fundamentalism' in the Revolution which, having succeeded, treated them as second-class citizens? Secondly, was the dominance of a 'fundamentalist' agenda inevitable, or could it have been prevented?

To explore both questions we need to go back to the early revolutionary period. I limit my discussion to this period, not only because it was then that 'warning signs' that were ignored might have been identified, but also because what happened during that period enabled the Islamists to succeed through a policy of divide and rule. I begin with the massive participation of women in demonstrations during the 1978 upheavals, and end with the ascendancy of the Islamist forces in summer 1981.

Unity and ambiguity

Two points must be remembered with respect to women's role during the Revolution. Firstly, the Revolution in Iran was a popular movement and its success was due to the alliance of various political and social forces. What united them was their opposition to the Pahlavi regime and their desire for its removal. If women *en masse* participated in the Revolution and gave their support to its leadership, they did so not with a specific set of objectives and goals as 'women', but 'as members of different political and social forces'.[1]

Secondly, it was only in the final stages of this revolution that Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as its indisputable leader and Islamists started to impose their ideological objective of the creation of an 'Islamic state'. Even then it was not clear what an 'Islamic state' would entail for women. The proclamations of Ayatollah Khomeini and other religious leaders were couched in very general terms and were open to interpretation. The scope of women's rights was among the main concerns of foreign and Iranian journalists who visited Khomeini in Paris in late 1978. Both in Paris and later in Iran, he repeatedly assured women that 'Islam' had the best programme for the advancement of women and protection of their rights. This was in line with the belief of the masses of women from the so-called 'traditional' classes who gave their whole-hearted support to the Revolution. For them, like other Muslim women, Islam had always been associated with justice and human dignity. As Leila Ahmed says, it is the ethical and egalitarian voice in Islam that women choose to hear and adhere to, not its patriarchal legal mandates as defined by *fiqh* (jurisprudence).[2] Iranian women who took part in the Revolution were no exception to this. Moreover, ideologues like Shari'ati and Motahhari had already succeeded in offering an 'Islamic ideal of womanhood' as a liberating alternative to the 'feminism' that they associated with Western decadence and the corruption of the Pahlavi regime. Neither Motahhari nor Shari'ati were explicit as to what this 'Islamic ideal of womanhood' entailed in practice, which left room for women active in Islamist organisations to turn it into a liberating project.[3]

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Division and clarity

It was against this backdrop that the revolutionary forces succeeded in overthrowing the Pahlavi regime, and the provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan came into office on 11 February 1979. Comprising moderate Islamic and Nationalist personalities, Bazargan's government became the target of criticism and attack by both radical Islamists and secular leftist forces for not being 'revolutionary' enough.[4]

As far as women were concerned, Bazargan's government was marked by two concurrent developments. The first was the imposition of patriarchal interpretations of the *shari'a* and morality codes and the dismantling of pre-revolutionary legal reforms. On 26 February, a communiqué issued from the office of Ayatollah Khomeini declared the 1967 Family Protection Law (which had curtailed men's access to divorce and polygamy) non-Islamic. There followed other bans: women could no longer study mining and agriculture, or serve as judges, or appear in public without *hijab*. All these were in the name of 'protecting the Islamic dignity of women'.

The second development was the mushrooming of hundreds of women's groups all over the country, in mosques, government offices, factories, schools and so on. Ranging from small and spontaneous to large and organised, these groups represented the three main ideological tendencies, Islamic, Nationalist, and Marxist, which together brought about the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty. Some of them were affiliated to underground political organisations in the *ancien régime*, others were formed during the Revolution.[5] All these groups saw the issue of women's rights as secondary to wider anti-imperialist goals and interests. Women active in these groups shared the same view; they were concerned to win the struggle for control of the Revolution, and women's rights was a minor issue on their agenda.

These developments eventually brought about a breakdown of the apparent unity of women, their division into two distinct camps, Islamists and secularists, and an open confrontation between the latter and the state. This happened on International Women's Day on 8 March 1979, when thousands of women demonstrated in Tehran and Shiraz to protest against the gradual loss of their rights. Ayatollah Khomeini's statement on the eve of the demonstrations, requiring women working in government offices to observe the 'Islamic code' of dress, also made *hijab* an issue. The authorities ignored the demonstrations, and radical Islamist groups (including women's organisations) and radio and television (now dominated by them) denounced them as agitation by promiscuous women and agents of the previous regime. The demonstrations, planned by a number of secular women's groups, went ahead, and many other women joined in to register their protest against what they saw as violations of their basic rights. They were attacked and harassed by groups of religious zealots and men drawn from the urban poor. The leftist and nationalist political groups kept silent, and their forces - including the nationalists' armed militia - stood by watching, denying women any protection or support.[6]

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Yet the scale of the women's protest was such that the Provisional Government had to modify Khomeini's statement on *hijab* and promise to set up new family courts to protect women's rights. But this gain was temporary and was soon lost as the nationalist and leftist forces - both inside and outside the government - denied their support to the women's cause. In so doing, they tacitly endorsed the Islamist gender rhetoric and allowed it to be translated into policy.

We know the rest of the story. The divisions among women and the silencing of the dissenting voices of secular women were the first success of the Islamists and set the scene for what followed. The onset of the war with Iraq in September 1980 provided the radical Islamists the best opportunity for implementing their version of Islamic ideology and eliminating any opposition. With Khomeini's dismissal of moderate president Bani-Sadr in June 1981, the hold of the radical Islamist forces was complete.

On the attitude of the secular leftist groups to women's rights, and the reasons for their tacit alliance with the populist policies of the Islamic Republic, and on the impact of the Islamic Revolution on the women's movement in Iran, there is a vast and eloquent literature produced by Iranian women academics, some of whom were active in these organisations at the time. What emerges from their accounts is that the gender vision of the so-called progressive male activists in these organisations was not so different from that of their Islamist counterparts.[7]

Conclusion

While concurring with the thrust of their analyses, I want to conclude this paper with two remarks. First, let me draw attention to a neglected aspect of Iranian women's engagement with Islamic fundamentalism. It was not only the women active in socialist organisations who felt betrayed by their male colleagues; women from all walks of life felt a similar sense of betrayal and confusion. This was something that I personally came to experience when I lived in Iran from 1980 to 1984, and documented in my subsequent research in family courts. Women felt that the very men they loved - their fathers, brothers and husbands - had tacitly colluded with the state in depriving them of what they considered their rights. What made the matter more painful for women activists who were believers was that religion gave these men the authority and legitimacy to do this. It was then that the seeds were planted of a new dissent, which contributed to the emergence of a reformist movement over two decades later, after the unexpected victory of Khatami in the 1997 presidential elections. Women's votes played a major part in bringing the reformist government of Khatami into office. Though the expected reforms have failed to materialise, the struggle for them continues.

Secondly, I suggest that the undemocratic and polarised political culture of Iran in the 1970s, together with the populist character of the 1979 Revolution, made the dominance of the 'fundamentalist' agenda espoused by the Islamist revolutionaries inevitable. Two elements that could have contained or moderated the Islamists' notion of gender rights and relations were absent from the revolutionary discourse. There was no indigenous feminist discourse around which women could rally, nor was the defence of women's rights a priority for the

various secularist groups who took part in the Revolution. The fact that both these elements were missing was - in different ways - a legacy of the skewed pattern of modernisation that had been espoused by the Pahlavi regime since the 1930s, and the appropriation of 'feminism' by the state in the 1960s. By the 1970s, in the minds of most political activists - whether Islamic or secular - 'feminism' and 'defence of women's rights' were both seen as part of the bourgeois project of the Pahlavis and as Western imports that should be resisted. When the Revolution happened, there was little in its political discourse and culture that could challenge and contain the populist agenda of the Islamists.

If Iranian women could not prevent the onslaught on their legal rights by the Islamist agenda at first, they later learned not only to resist it but even to turn it on its head. This is, in my view, what the Iranian experience has to offer.

Endnotes

[1] Nahid Yeganeh (1982) 'Women's Struggle in the Islamic Republic of Iran', in Azar Tabari and Nahid Yeganeh (eds) *In the Shadow of Islam: The Women's Movement in Iran*, London: Zed Press, p. 35. See also the following for different perspectives: Nayereh Tohidi (1991) 'Gender and Islamic Fundamentalism: Feminist Politics in Iran', in Chandra Mohanty (ed.) *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Indiana University Press, pp 251-67; Azar Tabari (1982) 'The Enigma of the Veiled Iranian Women', MERIP 103 (February), pp. 22-27.

[2] Leila Ahmed (1992) *Women and Gender in Islam*, Yale University Press, p. 66.

[3] See Parvin Paidar (1995) *Women and Political Processes in Twentieth-Century Iran*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 175-82; Ziba Mir-Hosseini (1996) 'Stretching the Limits: A Feminist Reading of the Shari'a in Iran', in Mai Yamani (ed.) *Islam and Feminism: Legal and Literary Perspectives*, London: Ithaca Press, pp. 284-320.

[4] For an account of the politics of this period, see Shaul Bakhash (1985) *The Reign of Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution*, London: Counterpoint.

[5] For a partial list, see 'Part Three: Women's Organizations in Iran', in Tabari and Yeganeh (eds) *In the Shadow of Islam*, pp. 203-230.

[6] See Farah Azari (1983) 'The Post-Revolutionary Women's Movement in Iran', in Farah Azari (ed.) *Women of Iran: Conflict with Fundamentalism*, London: Ithaca Press, pp. 190-225; and Guity Nashat (1983) 'Women in the Ideology of the Islamic Republic', in Guity Nashat (ed.) *Women and the Revolution in Iran*, Boulder, CO: Westview, pp. 195-216.

[7] See, for instance, Haideh Moghissi (1994) *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggles in a Male-Dominated Revolutionary Movement*, New York: St. Martin's Press; Azar Tabari (1986) 'Women's Movement in Iran : A Hopeful Prognosis', *Feminist Studies* 2 (Summer), pp. 342-60; Soraya Afshar, 'The Attitudes of the Iranian Left to the Women's Question', in Farah Azari (ed.) *Women of Iran: The Conflict with Fundamentalism*, pp. 157-69.

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Nahda Younis Shehada

The Rise of Fundamentalism and the Role of the 'State' in the Specific Political Context of Palestine

Islamism, an overview

One notable feature of the Islamist discourse is that, despite appearances, it is not monolithic. Within the main discourse, there are multiple discourses that implicitly, if not openly, challenge each other to some degree while adhering to the main lines of their common discourse. Badran[1] believes that we need to adopt a flexible definition of Islamism because such an approach allows us to understand the ambivalences and contradictions within this discourse; it even enables us to 'see the more liberal and progressive' signals in this phenomenon. It helps us to see the 'ways in which Islamism is being challenged and eroded from within and thus bears some seeds of its own destruction'.[2]

Within the category of Islamists there are different strands, ranging from those who 'advocate the establishment of an Islamic state' to those who 'promote the notion of an Islamic society or community within a secular state'. This includes those who 'behave politically to achieve the personal freedom to express their religious identity in public as they see fit'. Another important strand that could be depicted as 'progressive Islamism' is that of the South African model, 'which promote[s] progressive readings of the *Qur'an* and their applications in everyday life'.[3]

Al-Azmeh[4] argues that, despite their seemingly antagonistic relationship, Islamists and nationalists share the same world-view; the call for authenticity is apparent in their discourses, which is a 'central notion in a romantic conception of history'. Authenticity is the idiom by which the historical world is reduced to a particular order of alternating periods of decadence and health.[5] Thus, for authentic Islamists and authentic secular nationalists, the cure for the current illness in the Arab world is a return to the glorious days of the Islamic Empire or, in the words of Malik, 'a transformation from corruption to purity'.[6] Authenticity in this sense is both 'past and future … [where] [t]he past is the accomplished future and the future is the past reasserted'.[7]

In contrast to the argument by Tibi that the new Islamist movements in the Middle East are a reaction to the secularised and westernised states,[8] Al-Azmeh believes that Islamists and Arab nationalists have much in common; they are each determined by the other's discourse. Islamists invoke the Arabisation of Islam and nationalists invoke the Islamic nature of Arabs. The main bond between the two discourses is the 'discursive construction of a common enemy', enabling them to cooperate under a wide banner: my enemy is yours and your enemy is mine.[9]

In Palestine, an examination of the main nationalist movement, *Fatah* (the ruling party of the Palestine Liberation Organisation [PLO] and consequently of the Palestinian Authority [PA]), and the main Islamist movement, *Hamas*, shows the blurred boundaries between the two. One explanation for their similarities is that the leadership of both movements comes from the same class background. Sharabi writes that the similarity between the two discourses is due to the petty bourgeois origin of the two political movements.[10] Mishal and Sela[11] shed more light on the commonality between *Fatah* and *Hamas* as two political movements deriving their support from a Palestinian majority that does not have a strong political affiliation and

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tends to be associated with the Islamic Arab tradition. Thus the public perception of *Hamas* and *Fatah* as being complementary rather than competitive asserts the fact that the social boundaries that are supposed to clarify the differences between the two are rather fluid and flexible.

But what is missing in Mishal and Sela's argument is the fact that political frontiers are conditioned by the specific context of their creation and development: they are subject to time, place and historical circumstance, by the power balance between the two parties as they shift their strategies, by who is in power and who is in opposition.

Fatah's discourse is more flexible than that of *Hamas*, despite the fact that it was created by Muslim Brotherhood members (one of whom was Yasser Arafat). The reason for this is that the leadership of the PLO emerged in the 1960s, when Arab nationalism was influential in directing PLO discourse (particularly Nasserism); thus even the most conservative PLO members were affected by the secular inspiration of Marxist PLO members, which acted as a moderating influence. Being away from the daily confrontation with the occupation and thus liberated from having to deal with practical and strategic social questions in the occupied territories, in addition to the experience of being in Lebanon for a long time (1971-1982) and thus inevitably influenced by its relatively open culture, were factors in the moderate discourse of the PLO.

Women are an essential symbol in the discourse of Islamism, and they are co-opted by Islamist movements exactly as they were co-opted by the national movements. In the nationalist discourse, women occupied a central place during the struggle for independence, 'only to be shunted aside after independence was won'.[12] Islamist movements are as oppressive and patriarchal as nationalist ones. In this sense, they are no more than a copy of nationalist movements.

Kandiyoti's reflections are useful to end this section.[13] She prefers to discuss Islamist and nationalist discourses about women in the context of state/civil society friction. The false dichotomy between indigeneity and westernisation, and thus the rigid question of whether Islamism is a challenge or alternative to modernity, become more and more irrelevant. A preferable framework is political, one that poses the question: what type of politics at the levels of state and opposition continues to invoke the false dichotomy of secularisation or traditional, westernisation or authenticity? Framing the question in the terrain of politics allows us to examine the political movements' demands for freedom and democracy, and thus to see how these movements incorporate views about gender that create restrictive practices curtailing women's life options.[14] This is the approach that will be used in this paper.

The rise of the Islamist movement

This paper situates the debate around the rise and expansion of *Hamas* and other Islamist[15] groups in Palestine in the terrain of *politics*, rather than focusing on their ideological roots as the sole focus of investigation. Any political or social movement, regardless of its nature (religious or secular), works to achieve its goals through realistic and practical decisions.

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Therefore, when scrutinising the Islamists' political development, it makes sense to examine their shifting strategies in response to local and regional politics. In other words, instead of encapsulating Islamists within fixed ideological boundaries, a better approach is to concentrate on the dynamics of negotiation between them and their opponents over the shifting boundaries shaped by meaning of political identity and interpretation of social values.[16] The examination of the Islamist movement *Hamas* will be conducted in this light.

The beginnings

When the Muslim Brotherhood established their institutions in Gaza in the late 1970s, their main aim was to transform Palestinian society from the roots through the 'founding of the Islamic personality'.[17] The Brotherhood's main focus throughout the long Israeli occupation was on education, welfare and community life rather than direct struggle against Israel. This entailed 'an abstention from all forms of anti-occupation activity, prioritizing instead a cultural struggle against the PLO's atheist commitment to secular nationalism'.[18]

In the late 1970s, Gazan students were no longer able to pursue their studies in Egypt,[19] nor were they able to go to the universities in the West Bank due to Israeli restrictions. It was a ripe situation for the Islamists (Muslim Brotherhood at that time) to establish the Islamic University in Gaza, which attracted students from the poor in Gaza, to educate a new generation under Islamist ideology. Simultaneously, in the West Bank, more students from the rural periphery entered the universities.[20]

By the mid 1980s, the Muslim Brotherhood (which declared itself as *Hamas* in the early months of the first *Intifada* in 1987), had been able to build an impressive social infrastructure, financed by Saudi Arabia, the most conservative country in the Arab world. It controlled 40% of Gaza's mosques, and the Islamic university, which, with 7,000 students, was the largest in the occupied territories.[21] Thus when the first *Intifada* erupted, a new generation of university students fuelled it. Coming from rural and poor families, and influenced by Islamist ideology, they brought a perspective to the student movement which was to become the hegemonic ideology of the new vibrant and angry generation.

The first *Intifada*

A shift in the Islamists' strategy took place in the late 1980s, and specifically in the first days of the *Intifada*. The shift was from the 'reformist' approach, which focused on transforming society from below, towards 'active political engagement', thus challenging the secular nature of the PLO.[22] The objective, especially for *Hamas*, in particular, was to establish an alternative to the PLO project politically and socially. Such an ambition was appreciated, and thus nurtured, by Israel, since it constituted a favourable alternative to the highly popular PLO factions in the occupied territories.

Hasan contends that Israel nurtured and allowed *Hamas* to act without interference for a long time.[23] One indication of this was that until the killings inside Israel increased, the number of *Hamas* prisoners in relation to the size of the organisation was lower than that of prisoners

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from other organisations. Usher makes a similar observation, that despite its propaganda against Jews, '*Hamas*' relation with the occupation authorities remained essentially quietist, with the [Israeli] army never interfering with *Hamas* strike days'.[24]

During the first *Intifada, Hamas*' activities focused on controlling women's behaviour through a social offensive against all manifestations of 'un-Islamic behaviour', especially in the Gaza Strip, where women were forced to wear the headscarf as a sign of both modesty and nationalist rectitude. One of the pervasive wall slogans in Gaza at that time was, '*Hamas* considers the unveiled to be collaborators with the enemy'.[25] Thus, with a mixture of consent and coercion, *Hamas* demonstrated its leading-group power, to use Gramsci's terminology.[26]

Hamas' enforcement of the *hijab* in Gaza is not about modesty, respect, or nationalism, nor is it to protect women from lustful male eyes, as their public discourse keeps repeating. A political analysis makes it clear that *Hamas* used the wearing of the *hijab* to establish a new political reality on the ground, to shift the *Intifada* away from what was a highly democratic process towards a direction considered desirable by the Islamists and by the Israeli authorities.[27] Most importantly, it was a manifestation of the Islamists' power to impose rules by attacking secularist groups and the national movement at their most vulnerable point: over issues of women's liberation.[28] In so doing, the Islamists distorted values, especially those related to women's liberation within the national liberation process. Tens of women were murdered as alleged 'collaborators' just because their personal behaviour was not in conformity with the norms imposed by *Hamas*. Thus the *Intifada* was tacitly turned into a social counter-revolution.

What is even worse is that the unified leadership of the first *Intifada*, which consisted of all secular and democratic forces, accepted *Hamas*' social conservative agenda. In 1989-90, under the politically classic banner of 'unity against the enemy', the leadership called for national harmony over divisive and 'marginal' issues such as the *hijab*, and tacitly supported the enforcement measures of the Islamists in the Gaza Strip. Thus the nationalists short-sightedly gave their temporary political interest higher priority than women's rights, not realising that this compromise threatened their very existence.

In addition, the polarisation of political forces, between the 'nationalist secular right' (represented by the biggest movement in the PLO, *Fatah*, allied to a locally based bourgeoisie), and the Islamists, has tended to marginalise the Palestinian left. Thus a considerable sector of Palestinian society (committed to democracy, political, cultural and religious pluralism, equality and social justice) remains without a platform and a unifying organisational framework.[29] The political vacuum in Palestinian politics due to the weakness of the left has been filled by two alternatives. One is the revival of the traditional social structures, encouraged by the secular right, and the other is the increased popularity of the Islamists. In both cases, the losers are Palestinians as a whole, but particularly Palestinian women.

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At the end of the first *Intifada*, *Hamas* was able to present itself as the legitimate national alternative to the PLO. When the largest faction in the PLO appeared to abandon the armed struggle in favour of negotiation with the 'enemy', *Hamas* clung to established national values that were encapsulated in the notion of persistent armed struggle until the liberation of historical Palestine. *Hamas* thus confronted the PLO's secular nationalism with an Islamic-national discourse; it needed no amendment of the original PLO slogans, merely their Islamisation.[30]

The Oslo agreement

Several significant factors prepared the ground for the rise of *Hamas* as an alternative to the exiled PLO in the early 1990s: the PLO's military defeat in Lebanon; the rise of a local national movement inside the occupied territories, especially the *Intifada*; and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first Gulf war was another watershed because it changed the international and regional balance of power, turning the PLO into nothing more than a disintegrating bureaucracy, without funds, located in Tunis. Its only aim was survival, and its only claim to legitimacy was that it represented Palestinians. However, its support among Palestinians was declining as the *Intifada* gained momentum.

All these factors made it possible for the Israelis to recognise the PLO, and led to the signing of the Oslo agreement on 13 September 1993. The agreement originated a process that sustained Israel's historical position of neither full withdrawal from, nor annexation of, all the occupied territories. It also made the PLO responsible for Israel's security from Palestinian attacks, without allowing Palestinians the right to self-determination.[31]

The Oslo agreement between the PLO and Israel was a landmark in the struggle of the Palestinian people for self-determination and statehood. The agreement was mediated on the basis of a severe imbalance of power between Israel and the PLO; Israel always had the upper hand. The Oslo agreement does not talk about the Palestinians as a nation, or as a people; does not recognise the existence of the refugees; and does not deal with territory, with the land. For most Palestinians, the Oslo agreement was wholly an Israeli formula, for by its terms the PLO became the guardian of Israeli security rather than the security of Palestinians. On the other hand, the agreement has enabled the PA to control the population without reference to sovereignty, specifically to rights over land, resources, and external relations. It has allowed the previous PLO élite to assert and maintain political leadership without the need to legitimate itself through the articulation of a social agenda.[32]

The lack of formal independence, of sovereignty and control over borders and resources, and an almost undemocratic socio-political structure, have enabled the PA to retain its internal policies, which are decided by the space it can negotiate with the Islamists without alienating Israel. It is in this negotiation that women's interests suffer.

The PA's poor performance, particularly with regard to the autocratic and authoritarian style of its head, has opened the door to increased criticism from all sectors of the political spectrum. The rising popularity of the Islamists is one expression of this dissatisfaction. Palestinians are

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disappointed that the Authority has brought them neither independence nor social justice.[33] This plays a great role in strengthening their belief that justice can be achieved through Islamic laws. Constructing a mythical past of Islamic justice is one of the mechanisms used by Palestinians to endure current hardships and dream of a better future.

In this context, the Islamists' strategies are best seen as a political response to the Oslo agreement and its leadership. The Islamists constantly emphasise the fact that Palestinian society is locked in daily struggle with a neighbouring country that makes no secret of its enmity. Thus, by relying on the hegemonic power of religion and using interpretations of the *Qur'an* that support their control, their actions constitute - in the eyes of the frustrated and disappointed public - a praiseworthy response to the corrupt PA on the one hand and the ever-present and murderous enemy on the other. After Oslo, the Islamists' aim was to break out of the political boundaries set by the PA and Israel. In an extension of their role as 'defenders of the faith', the Islamists link any attempt to improve the lives of Palestinian women with a perceived international (Western) conspiracy against Islam. The constant Israeli threat acts to their benefit, because *Hamas* is seen as the only force willing to stand up to the enemy.

In the years following the Oslo agreement, *Hamas* became more concerned with laying the social foundation for the eventual defeat of the PA. Relying on its relative political power, *Hamas* adopted another strategy: a shift towards the reformist approach to achieve political objectives. Significant amongst its activities are the many well-established mosques with ideologically influenced *imams*; the reputable Islamic university, with its economic resources available to ideologically committed students; outreach health and education services; the employment opportunities provided to people. All these services carry a clear message to the people of *Hamas'* concern and efficiency: the contrast between the Islamists' high-quality social services and the poor performance of 'governmental institutions' speaks volumes. Thus *Hamas* has not only been able to maintain a high public profile, but it has also been able to win the defection of many of its opponents' supporters.

Conceptual underpinnings of the relation between the PA and *Hamas*

The PA came into existence because of the Oslo agreement. Therefore, in order to define the PA conceptually, we have to keep in mind that the relation between Palestine and Israel is one of dominance by Israel. This paper conceptualises and analyses the PA in the framework of power and hegemony as defined by Foucault and Gramsci. One aspect of Gramsci's notion of hegemony involves *resistance* and *negotiation*. In order to change the power relation with Israel, the Palestinians use a combination of resistance and negotiation. The Islamists use the discourse of *resistance,* while the PA enforces the discourse of *negotiation.* The PA's discourse since the Oslo agreement has increasingly focused on negotiation at the expense of resistance, and it has thus attempted to delegitimise the discourse of the Islamists. The negotiation discourse defines Israeli violations of Palestinians' human rights and other anti-Palestinian activities merely as violations of the peace process. Thus the crucial factor in relations between Palestine and Israel becomes the PA's compliance with its role as guardian of Israel's security, not the confrontation between coloniser and colonised.

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Power is a crucial element in the process through which the PA and the Islamists define and set rules, and measure their ability to restrict or demarcate each other's limits. In this sense, the PA's heavy dependence on coercive practices to keep the Islamists within their allotted space makes it a dominant group rather than a hegemonic one. Yet, there are some elements of consent in that relation.

To obtain that consent, the PA uses Islamic discourse as well as the liberation discourse that has been built up over thirty years of occupation. It also uses its control over the education system, and media in general. In addition, the PA has the advantage of being in office and therefore having the capability to use disciplinary power to build up its hegemony. The PA's power in this respect is derived from its legitimacy, which enables it to enforce a specific social change or maintain existing social relations, including gender relations, through its ability to pass laws and implement policies. This is a crucial aspect of the PA's disciplinary power, providing it with a capacity not only to govern, but also to guarantee the continuing domination of its discourse. The PA has also appropriated the discourse of the Islamists and is using it for its own advantage.

In the power relation between the PA and the Islamists, the Islamists are subordinated. The intellectual dominance of the PA does not mean that the Islamists accept the PA's dominance. The dialectic of the relation with the Islamists creates daily challenges to the relatively hegemonic power of the PA as the Islamists try to go beyond the boundaries allocated to them. Thus the Islamists, even in their subordinated position, play an active role and are involved in active confrontation. In a Foucauldian sense, power relations do not play a merely repressive role; on the contrary, they are productive wherever they come into play.[34] The PA's repressive practices and *unproductive power* lead to *productive resistance* from the Islamists. This strengthens the Islamist discourse, and women are the losers.

The power relations between these two parties are not stable because they are based on inequalities and the parties are constantly attempting to change. Therefore, we witness the Islamists negotiating with the PA on social aspects such as the full Islamisation of the Family Law. The Islamic discourse is thus a field of negotiation and resistance between the PA and the Islamists.

The current situation

Another shift has taken place recently in *Hamas*' agenda. Since the eruption of the second *Intifada* in September 2000, *Hamas* has shifted its priorities to more violent activities. At first, it viewed the second *Intifada* as merely an attempt by the PA to improve its position at the negotiating table. However, after a few months, *Hamas* realized the potential of the second *Intifada* for increasing its support at the expense of the PA.

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Whenever a political settlement is about to be reached, *Hamas* demonstrates its dissatisfaction in a very violent way: by attacking Israeli civilians. This strengthens the hand in particular of Jewish fundamentalists on the other side of the border, sustaining their discourse and power. Thus *Hamas* can be seen to be a highly pragmatic organisation, which is capable of changing its strategies in response to the changing political environment.

Conclusion

In the 1970s, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation wanted to build a 'secular' state that would derive its laws from international conventions and human rights standards. In the late 1980s, changes in international and regional politics compelled the PLO to accept the Oslo agreement, even though it left many important issues unresolved.

On the other hand, the objective of the Islamists in the 1980s (of *Hamas*, in particular), and especially during the *Intifada*, was to establish an alternative to the PLO project politically and socially. *Hamas*' political alternative was to build a religious Islamic state in which the main sources of legislation would be the *Qur'an* and *shari'a*, as they interpret and define them.[35] Nine years after Oslo, *Hamas* has been shifting its strategy from reformism to violence, in order to achieve this end. The squeeze on *Hamas* funds following its labelling as a terrorist group by the US has served to provide a further reason for the shift away from reformism. *Hamas*' ultimate goal is not to destroy the peace process *per se*, nor is it to reassert Islamic culture; its aim is to oppose radically the PA's political project and seize power once and for all. In the end, the price of the ascendance of Islamists will be paid not only by women, but also by all the democratic, secular and leftist forces in Palestine.

Endnotes

[1] M. Badran (2001) 'Understanding Islam, Islamism, and Islamic Feminism', *Journal of Women's History* 13 (1), pp 47-52.

[2] ibid.

[3] When Dr. Badran visited Johannesburg, she was astonished to receive an invitation to speak at a mosque during Friday prayers. As Mattock explains, she thought, 'These people must be somewhere where other people are not. She says that their Islamism is very different and so is their feminism. In other parts of the world, a person who is not Muslim would not be allowed to enter a mosque to speak during the Friday prayer. However, it is even more unheard of for a woman who is not of the Islamic faith to be allowed to enter a mosque on Friday during prayer to speak. In South Africa, the movement is very opposed to gender apartheid. It is a different kind of political experience', in J. Mattock (2001) 'Feminist Scholar Lectures on Controversial Islamic Feminist Movement'.

[4] A. Al-Azmeh (1993) *Islams and Modernities*, London: Verso Press.

[5] ibid, p. 42.

[6] J. Malik (1998) 'Making sense of Islamic Fundamentalism' *http://www.isim.nl/newsletter/1/research/01AD30.html*

[7] Al-Azmeh, ibid, p. 48.

[8] B. Tibi (1992) *Religious Fundamentalism and Ethnicity in the Crisis of the Nation-State in the Middle East: Superordinate Islamic and Pan-Arabic Identities and Subordinate Ethnic and Sectarian Identities*, Berkeley: University of California, Center for German and European Studies, Working Paper.

[9] J. Torfing (1999) *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

[10] H. Sharabi (1988) *Neopatriarchy, a Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[11] S.Mishal and A. Sela (2000) *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Coexistence*, New York: Columbia University Press, p. 48.

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[12] Badran, ibid, p. 49.

[13] D. Kandiyoti (2001) 'The Politics of Gender and the Conundrum of Citizenship' in S. Joseph and S. Slymovics (eds) *Women and Power in the Middle East*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp 52-61.

[14] Kandiyoti, ibid, pp. 56-8.

[15] This paper uses the term 'Islamists' rather than 'fundamentalists' because the latter term is a value-laden concept which tends to be used in the context of political terrorism. There is no intention in this paper to evaluate the military strategies of *Hamas* or any other political actors.

[16] Mishal and Sela ibid; Kandiyoti ibid.

[17] G. Usher (1995b) 'What Kind of Nation? The Rise of *Hamas* in the Occupied Territories', *Race and Class* (issue on the theme 'Palestine: Diplomacies of Defeat'), 37(2), pp. 65-80.

[18] Usher, ibid.

[19] This was due to the signing of the Camp David agreement between Egypt and Israel (1978) and the subsequent friction in the PLO's relations with the Sadat regime in Egypt.

[20] Mishal and Sela, ibid.

[21] Usher, ibid.

[22] Mishal and Sela, ibid, p. 46.

[23] M. Hasan (1993) 'On Fundamentalism in Our Land', part of the '*Dossier*, Women Living Under Muslim Laws' series, no. 11/12/13, pp. 35-9, Grabels, France: International Solidarity Network of Women Living Under Muslim Laws.

[24] Usher, ibid, p. 67.

[25] Usher, ibid, p. 67.

[26] G. Arrighi (1993) 'The Three Hegemonies of Historical Capitalism', in S. Gill. (ed.) *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 148-85.

[27] The term 'democratic' is used here to depict the popular makeup of the *Intifada*. Palestinians - as communities and grassroots organisations - formed committees on district and sub-district levels. Sometimes the committees were formed on a professional basis, e.g. committees for students, workers, health-service providers, agricultural workers, women's activists, etc. Such flexibility facilitated the organisation of anti-occupation activities depending on local conditions. There was no hierarchy as such in the first days of the *Intifada*. The process of institutionalisation was rather slow, and it did not take place straightaway. It has also been suggested that the establishment of *Hamas* accelerated the institutionalisation of the *Intifada*, and thus contributed to its hierarchical character; see Hasan, ibid.

[28] R. Hammami (1990) 'Women, the Hijab and the Intifada', *Middle East Report* 20 (3&4), pp. 24-8.

[29] J. Hilal (1995) 'The PLO: Crisis in Legitimacy', *Race and Class* (issue on the theme 'Palestine: Diplomacies of Defeat') 37(2), pp. 1-18.

[30] Mishal and Sela, ibid, p. 15.

[31] G. Usher (1995a) 'Bantustanisation or Bi-nationalism? An interview with Azmi Bishara', *Race and Class* (issue on the theme 'Palestine: Diplomacies of Defeat?') 37(2), pp. 43-50.

[32] C. Parker (1999) *Resignation or Revolt? Socio-political Development and the Challenges of Peace in Palestine*, London: I. B. Tauris Publishers, p. xii.

[33] For details of the dramatic impact of the Oslo agreement on the Palestinian economy, see: S. Roy (1996) 'Economic Deterioration in the Gaza Strip', *Middle East Research & Information Project,* 26(200): pp. 36-9; S. Roy (1998) 'The Palestinian Economy after Oslo', *Current History*, January 1998, pp. 19-25.

[34] J. Sawicki (1991) *Disciplining Foucault*, New York and London: Routledge.

[35] For more details, see: Rafael Yisraeli (1989) 'The Charter of the *Hamas*', in Y. Alexander and H. Foxman (eds) *The 1988-1989 Annual on Terrorism*: Kluwer Academic Publishers; L. Taraki (1989) 'The Islamic Resistance Movement in the Palestinian Uprising'*, Middle East Report,* 19(156), pp. 30-2; M. Litvak (1998) 'The Islamization of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: The case of *Hamas*', *Middle Eastern Studies,* 34(1), pp. 148-63; and *http://www.womeningreen.org/Hamas.html*.

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