RESEARCH ARTICLE

Economic violence towards Palestinian Israeli women

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Abstract:

While most studies of gender-based violence have focused on its physical, sexual, and psychological manifestations, this paper seeks to draw attention to the types of economic violence experienced by Palestinian Israeli women, describing its consequences in various aspects of their lives. Based on qualitative research I conducted among Palestinian Israeli women since 2007, it provides a glimpse at manifestations of economic violence, focusing on two topics: (1) Single mothers' experiences and the coping mechanisms they employ in addressing various family issues and (2) attitudes towards inheritance among Palestinian Israeli women and the normative trend of inheritance renunciation despite the options offered them within the framework of Shari'a religious law and Israel's civil legal system.

Analysis employs terminology taken from Walby's (1989) *dual systems theories*, examining the ways in which economic oppression of women takes place simultaneously in two mutually reinforcing spheres (private and public) within a patriarchal context.

Key Words: Economic violence; Palestinian Israeli women; single mothers; patriarchy; Muslim women; inheritance renunciation.

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Introduction

Violence is a growing problem in all "parts and periods" (Durusay, 2013: 34). While most studies of gender-based violence have focused on its physical, sexual and psychological manifestations (Olufunmilayo, 2008), this study draws attention to the various types of economic violence experienced by Palestinian Israeli women, describing its consequences in different aspects of their lives.

Durusay (2013) acknowledges the challenge of rendering economic violence more visible, noting that several major international documents ignore the topic entirely.[1] In the Israeli context as well, numerous studies concerning violence experienced by Israeli women as a whole and Palestinian Israeli women in particular (Haj-Yahia, 1998, 2000; Hassan, 1999; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006) fail to mention its economic aspects. Economic violence is one aspect of a broader discussion concerning women's financial rights and is of particular significance in traditional patriarchal societies, in which women have virtually no such rights. In ancient societies, only the patriarch owned property – that included his concubines, who were not entitled to possess anything of their own (Kamir, 2002). Even today, many women, including working and educated women, are unable to achieve financial independence, having been denied ownership of economic resources and family property. Moreover, they suffer from inferior conditions, lower salaries, discrimination, humiliation and offensive attitudes at work. These situations are part of a more extensive compass of economic violence manifestations that are typically underreported, as are other types of violence. Economic violence also has a gender component, serving as an instrument for the control, restriction, subjugation and subordination of women by their families or employers and as an effective tool for exploitation of gender power relations.[2] In Israel, economic violence has not been included to date among the prohibitions

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[1] Such as the 1993 Vienna Declaration, the CEDAW Committee General Advice Conclusions and the Peking +5 declarations, although it was mentioned in the 2006 European Council Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men and in the 2010 Women's Charter, that defines five areas of equal economic independence and equal values/wages (*Durusay, 2013).*

[2] About a third of all women in Israel are subject to economic violence perpetrated by their spouses (Saar, 2015).

stipulated in the Domestic Violence Prevention Law; consumer protection laws and bank regulations ignore its existence entirely (Saar, 2015).

Palestinian Israeli women experience gender discrimination that permeates the patriarchal hegemony typical of Israeli and Palestinian societies (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 1999; Hassan, 1999; Herzog, 2010; Saʿar, 2007). They are also part of a Palestinian minority that suffers discrimination and oppression and is sharply differentiated from Israeli Jewish society (Smooha, 2001).

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, government policies have violated the human and civil rights of the country's Palestinian minority, whose distress originates in the disparity between its high natural increase rate and restrictions on settlement and development, as well as diminution of land reserves in Arab communities (Abou-Tabickh, 2008). Discrimination is also evident in the job market, where low wages and financial constraints on economic development in Arab localities exacerbate the Palestinian minority's inferior status (Haidar, 2005). These policies, community attitudes (Abou-Tabickh, 2008) and the patriarchal context combine to accord men a considerable degree of economic supremacy over women.

This study is based on research I have been conducting among Palestinian Israeli women since 2007, addressing their situation and experiences and assessing their status in their families and communities. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews analyzed in keeping with the principles of feminist research. Several aspects of the participants' lives reflect their economic situation, including: Women's use of financial resources; money as a tool to subjugate women; educating women towards future control of earning power; women's job market experiences; discriminatory behavior inherent in a common heritage and the feasibility and sustainability of such behavior following divorce or widowhood.

An extensive research corpus (e.g., Aviram, 2000; Abu-Baker, 2007; Abu-Rabia-Queder and Weiner-Levy, 2013; Haj-Yahia, 1998, 2000; Haleihel, 2011; Hassan, 1999; Herzog, 2004, 2010; Sa'ar, 2004, 2007; Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2006) took shape over the past few years, addressing Palestinian women who are citizens of Israel but hardly touching on economic violence (Abou-Tabickh, 2008; Hacker, 2010; Sandberg and Hofri-Winogradow, 2012). Consequently, the present study seeks to develop an initial, limited discussion of the distress affecting Palestinian Israeli women who experience economic violence. Emphasis on gender-related aspects of economic issues can help consolidate discourse underscoring the economic damage that Palestinian Israeli women incur, eventually leading to improvement of their economic rights and overall status in society.

Palestinian women who are Israeli citizens – sociopolitical context

In 2015, the Palestinian minority in Israel numbered some 1,658,000[3] people constituting 20.7% of Israel's total population. Women comprise 49.1% of this group (ICBS, 2015). According to researchers, Palestinian Israeli women experience inequality and repression in many aspects of life, including economics, employment, politics and education. The gender inequality originating in the patriarchal order typifying Israeli society in general and Palestinian society in Israel in particular constitutes a further dimension of their oppression (Herzog, 2004; Sa'ar, 2007).

Various studies (such as Abu-Rabia-Queder and Weiner-Levy, 2013; Herzog, 2010; Sa'ar, 2007) have discussed the complexity characterizing the daily lives of Palestinian women in Israel, who experience multiple realities simultaneously and live their lives in spaces demanding mastery of a language of mixed cultures and imposing ambivalent, 'hyphenated' realities with regard to identity and independence. Under such conditions, oppression and self-preservation are interwoven with challenges and resistance (Sa'ar, 2007; Abu-Rabia-Queder and Weiner-Levy, 2013). Despite exclusion from the Israeli hegemony and the multiple economic, status-related and political tensions that shape their lives – including marginality and various types of vicious circles – Palestinian Israeli women are indeed affected by the processes experienced by Israeli society as a whole. Over the past three decades, familial, economic, educational and sociocultural changes have been taking place within this group, especially declining birth rates, greater participation of women in the work force, increased education[4] and changes in traditional-patriarchal perceptions (Gharrah, 2013; Hleihel, 2011; ICBS, 2012). These changes are reshaping the

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[3] Including East Jerusalem.

[4] Furthermore, over the past decade, there has been a noticeable increase in the education and integration of Palestinian Israelis in various types of employment. The number of Palestinian Israelis with academic diplomas rose from 7.2% in 2001 to 12.4% in 2011. The number of women within this group is of particular significance, having increased by a factor of 3.3 during the designated period (Liss-Ginsburg 2013).

options available to Palestinian Israelis – and especially to the women among them – in numerous aspects of life, including family and gender relations.

Researchers claim that although Palestinian family structure and characteristics have undergone certain changes, they remain patriarchal to this day (Haj-Yahia, 1998, 2000; Sa'ar, 2007). Relations within families are typified by demands to suppress personal needs and prioritize the family collective in exchange for assistance and support. Family members develop emotional reinforcement, mutual concern, cooperation, practical help and commitment to mutual interaction, manifested in celebrations and crisis situations and in their perceived role as partners in success and failure. When required, the extended family is enlisted to help individual family members and assume responsibility when one deviates from accepted behavioral norms (Sa'ar, 2007).

The collective ethos and its influence on shaping the family are also expressed in development of the self. Most Western theories focus on the growth and emergence of an autonomous and separate self, claiming that the nuclear family is its primary growth medium. By contrast, as Joseph (1999) notes, in the Arab family, shaping the self does not conform to the individualist, separatist and autonomous model. Joseph defines 'connectivity' as the psychological process wherein identity of self is totally absorbed within that of the collective. The self is not delineated within separate boundaries; rather, a person experiences himself/herself as part of others. Reciprocal claims of connected selves, argues Joseph, can also become mechanisms of control, particularly in cases of patriarchy.

In conclusion, this complex identity and the dual marginality that Palestinian women in Israel experience are supported by their gender-based exclusion and by the structure of opportunities, social difficulties and discrimination they face because of their nationality.

Economic violence against women

Olufunmilayo (2008) identified economic violence toward women as situations in which a male abuser maintains control of the family finances, deciding without regard to women how the money is to be spent or saved and thereby reducing women to complete dependence on him for money to meet their personal needs. It may involve putting women on a strict allowance or forcing them to beg for money. It may also be expressed by excluding women from financial decision making, preventing them from commencing or completing education, forbidding their assumption of formal or informal employment (*Durusay, 2013) or* controlling their access to land resources (see, e.g., Abou-Tabickh, 2008).

In summary, all manifestations of *economic violence originate in the* cultural and social structure of Palestinian Israeli society, its patriarchal traditions, personality traits, poverty and economic dependence. The patriarchal tradition, *as a social context*, is crucial to explaining subordination of women, as it embodies division of society into two distinct spheres.

Division of society: Basic assumptions

Considerable research has been accomplished concerning the link between the private and public spheres. This article refers primarily to two significant studies by Walby (1989, 1990) concerning the dual systems theory concept, positing that the patriarchal system coexists alongside capitalism. According to this perspective, both systems are present in and important to the structuring of contemporary gender relations (Walby, 1989). The theory considers numerous articulations of patriarchy and capitalism, claiming that six principal patriarchal structures combine to constitute a patriarchal system and that women's disadvantage in one sphere increases their vulnerability in the other. Walby (1990) views private and public patriarchy as a continuum rather than a rigid dichotomy. *Similarly, Durusay (2013)* identifies two distinct channels of economic violence and reveals the connection between them: The micro scale of patriarchal family relationships and the macro scale of capitalism's market logic. The patriarchy, she claims, practices economic violence: Its family-based division of labor compels those who are more dependent to rely on men's power in society. Although family structure has deteriorated and traditional norms are changing in many patriarchal countries, strategic control of money remains in men's hands. Regarding the macro sphere, *Durusay (2013)* considers capitalist patriarchy to be a modern manifestation of the patriarchal system. Over the past few years, the realities of employment have affected many women adversely: They experience an offensive atmosphere at work and suffer from wage disparities while remaining responsible for all domestic obligations, as traditional gender roles remain firmly in place.

Economic violence yields multiple consequences for its victims, many of whom are unable to achieve economic autonomy and sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their dependents, thereby intensifying poverty (*Olufunmilayo, 2008)*. The World Report on Violence and Health (WHO, 2002) announced that poverty violates the human rights of women and their children by denying them education, food, health, housing, participation in

political and public life and freedom from violence. Furthermore, women seldom experience economic violence in isolation. Economic abuse tends to engender an atmosphere of tension and general unrest over material concerns that may incite other types of violence as well. It also reflects social inequality and promotes sexual exploitation of women (*Olufunmilayo, 2008; Durusay, 2013*).

Method

Interviews

My initial research was conducted between 2007 and 2012. Thirty-three divorced, separated or widowed Palestinian Israeli Muslim[5] and Christian women participated in the study. All participants had children of various ages, some of whom lived with their mothers while others had married and left home. The participants' ages ranged between 30 and 45. They lived in various localities – about half in urban areas and the remainder in rural villages. Some were employed and others were not. Educational backgrounds differed from participant to participant. Subsequently, I interviewed 34 Palestinian Israeli married women and mothers from different social backgrounds, aged 27-49, with children of various ages. Participants' educational and employment data varied, as did their type/place of residence (rural villages vs. cities and towns).

Some of the women participating in the study were located through mutual friends and others by the snowballing technique. I conducted semi-structured interviews – an acceptable method of exploring feminist literature and discussing issues outside public discourse (women with marginal status) – that provide the researcher with a glimpse at the participants' thoughts and experiences (Reinharz, 1992).

Most interviews were conducted in Hebrew by a Jewish researcher and some in Arabic by a Palestinian Israeli interviewer. This study employed both 'inside' and 'outside' interviewers. Aviram (2000) claims that the identity component influences research design: Interviewers from within the collective or those who represent the 'dominant other' are liable to affect the interview situation and dynamically influence the structure of the conversation so generated. Aviram argues that a research design combining inside and outside interviewers may produce stratification, diversity and enrichment of the resulting picture, as interviewers establish their identity differentially, emphasizing different aspects with each participant, thus obtaining multidimensional results.

Although I am not a member of the minority, I did know some of the women personally and had met others during common political activity, helping to foster a sense of closeness. I demonstrate that an interviewer's inside knowledge gives rise to shared understanding and a common language, creating empathy across the political divide (see Watts, 2006: 385).[6] As such, the prevailing power relations were often not those obtaining between Jews and Arabs but rather among women who had acted in concert and already knew each other's political convictions. I felt I was crossing the social divide created by being a Jew among Palestinian women. Discussion of private lives remained awkward, however, exacerbated by the complex dynamic of a Jewish researcher interviewing Palestinians. Such encounters highlight differences of status, education and the like, already complicated by political and social relations between the Jewish majority and Palestinian minority. Lantin, a Jewish Israeli living in Ireland, also raises the question of whether such a researcher has the right to write about Palestinian women (Abdo and Lantin, 2002). Researchers in similar situations should bear their Jewish-Israeli identity in mind, as questions of identity and power are not abstract but actively affect encounters with participants, arousing concern and suspicion. Another potential pitfall is the possibility that participants may attempt to present an idyllic picture to outsiders, thereby distorting realities (Aviram, 2000).

At the same time, I felt the women often made the most of the interview to share their feelings with me, an ostensibly neutral interviewer from the outside, while simultaneously seeking some kind of approval or reinforcement of their behavior, considering the long way they had come since their divorce or separation. Most participants expressed the importance they ascribed to research in this field, conveying their hope that the study would help raise public awareness of their situation and improve the institutional care they receive.

Finally, venue affects interviews significantly as well. The participants selected meeting places, enabling them to undertake direct or symbolic negotiation with social conventions and express themselves about their community and society at large. Moreover, when a Jewish researcher interviews a Palestinian woman, the participant's choice to hold the interview at her home may be viewed as a demand that the researcher cross social and geographic borders, as well as an opportunity to demonstrate her agreement to participate (Herzog, 2004). Most participants tried to meet

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[5] Bedouin and Druze women did not participate in this study.

[6] In a similar vein, Watts (2006) describes how she obtained female engineer participants. She had previously worked in civil engineering and maintained professional and social contact with key figures, all male, who were eager to help her get to know the women she interviewed.

me alone in their homes. When this was impossible, we met at the college they attended, their workplace or other public institutions they frequent. My awareness of the importance of the venue helped me establish rapport with participants and conduct interviews in a manner with which they were comfortable.

Procedures

Interviews lasted at least sixty minutes and yielded extensive material. They enabled participants to express themselves freely and raise topics for discussion. Each interview included several major topics, such as comparison of married life with the preceding situation (studies, meeting and choosing their husbands), relations with their own and their husband's family, relationship with her children, place in the community, employment, education, etc. Often, the conversation digressed to general women's topics: Mothers discussing child-related issues or professional matters with participants who had also conducted qualitative interviews during their studies. Some expressed the hope that this study would help raise public awareness and improve treatment by state agencies.

Findings

According to *Durusay's* (2013) typology concerning *sources of economic violence (micro and macro scale)* and insights expressed by Walby (1990), we should understand patriarchy as a continuum rather than a rigid dichotomy. Taking space limitations into account, this paper focuses on two examples only whose analysis indicates that the two levels of discourse are to be linked, with no separation between micro and macro or between economic violence originating in the patriarchal family context and that which prevails under the auspices of the state and its agencies.

The first issue is connected with various aspects of economic violence from which Palestinian Israeli single mothers suffer. The process described above has contributed to an increase in the percentage of single-parent households among Palestinian families (10%) (ICBS, 2014).[7] Despite the increased frequency of the single mother category in Palestinian society, however, as well as the concomitant sociological trend towards heterogeneity, the patriarchal context remains a factor shaping family patterns, including that of single mothers.

Furthermore, this society still does not encourage or approve of divorce. In many families originating in diverse social backgrounds, divorce bears disgrace and divorcées are still the object of condemnation and criticism. Several communities consider it unacceptable for a woman to live alone with her children. In the economic context as well, women frequently have to leave their husbands' home penniless and receive no alimony.

In many respects, the status of single mothers is also influenced and shaped by broader social trends in Israeli society. The ideology advocating the values of a welfare state has lost support in Israel as the neoliberal perception that undermines its foundations continues to gain momentum. Policies pertaining to single mothers in Israeli society have been shaped in accordance with these perceptions and allowances granted previously have now been curtailed. In the absence of support systems, a substantial number of single mothers face poverty (Herbst, 2010; Toledano and Eliav, 2010). Beyond their designation as 'single mothers,' that determines the options available to them, their situation is also affected by the social context and their civil status.

The percentage of Palestinian women's participation in the labor force in Israel[8] is lower than that of Jewish women. A combination of cultural factors and the structure of financial and occupational opportunities for the Palestinian community in Israel hinders single mothers' attempts to live independently. The traditional nature of Palestinian society, its gender-based exclusion and family pressure, coupled with inequality in infrastructure, discrimination based on nationality and the refusal of many workplaces in Israel – both private and public – to employ Palestinians has brought about a limitation of financial and vocational opportunities that prevents single mothers from supporting their families. The situation is exacerbated by land availability constraints in the civil sphere, as noted earlier. Raising children in single-parent households entails dependence on relatives and family networks. Furthermore, sociopolitical and economic pressures compelled middle-class women to rely on their families – a practice more common among the lower socioeconomic strata. Worsened conditions are also apparent in the housing shortage experienced by Palestinian Israeli single mothers, a unique feature resulting from the legal

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[7] In recent years, the divorce rate has also risen in Palestinian society. In 2008, a total of 11,304 Jewish women were divorced, compared with 1,313 Muslim women. In 2010, the divorce rate stood at 6.2 Muslim women for every 1,000 marriages (ICBS, 2011).

[8] The percentage of employed Israeli-Palestinian women is 20.5% of all women of working age. In recent decades, however, the percentage of Palestinian women's participation in the Israeli labor force has risen consistently, corresponding with a general decline in birthrate and an increase in the standard of education. Nevertheless, it is still low compared with the percentage of Jewish working women (55.8%) (ICBS, 2012).

structuring of property division at the termination of marriage, as stipulated in the 1973 Financial Relations Law. Whether the marriage ends in divorce or on a spouse's death, each partner is entitled to half the value of all joint assets, excluding assets in their possession before the marriage or received by gift or inheritance thereafter.

Many Jewish couples in Israel buy their homes during the course of their marriage, whereas in Palestinian Israeli society, by contrast, it is accepted practice for a man to build a house before marriage that then becomes his property or his father's. As such, divorced or widowed Palestinian Israeli women cannot benefit from the Financial Relations Law. Communal property is not recognized in Islamic law (Layish, 1995), leaving women defenseless in religious courts. Moreover, the Israeli judicial system does not address gender or culturally-based rights to housing. When facing so many obstacles, the most common and accessible arrangement is for women to live in the extended family household. For divorcées, this means return to the family of origin, while widows live within their deceased husband's family's household.

The housing problems Palestinian Israeli single mothers now face can shed light on the complexity of their new family situation. The findings of this study indicate that participants living in extended family spaces experience physical and psychological hardship and are subjected to patriarchal gender subordination, as manifested in strict supervision by family members and the community. Interviews with divorcées indicate that in many cases, the economic violence they experience began as soon as they left the home in which they had lived during their marriage [9] – an act usually perceived as escape and as protection of their lives and those of their children at the cost of relinquishing their property and home.

Returning to one's parents' household without being given separate space bears implications beyond simple crowding issues. The absence of basic living conditions is a high price for these women and their children to pay; as unwanted 'hangers-on,' they are subject to a wide range of disempowering practices in their extended families of origin.

The physical protection and emotional support entailed in family 'giving' were of paramount importance to the participants. Its material component provides the women and their children with a reasonable *modus vivendi*, while emotional support establishes each such woman's identity in the community as the head of a single-parent family. Such giving, however, is not unconditional: The women have to increase their dependence on their families and communities and accede to local patriarchal arrangements, usually resulting in intensified subordination and repression.

The interviews show that receipt of support is conditional on adoption of strict rules of conduct, the implications of which are consent to supervision and restricted movement. Unlike previous studies, that described the imposition of restrictions in aggressive terms, using expressions such as 'disparagement,' 'humiliation' or 'violence,' the present analysis is based on conceptualization of 'gift economy,'[10] wherein dependence and obligation develop between the women and their families. The women receive some form of support from their families, but at the same time, family members and others, such as neighbors, supervise them in various ways,[11] including:

- Restricted freedom of movement in public and compulsory accompaniment in public areas, adversely affecting leisure activities and employment.
- Overseeing home visitor traffic and barring entry to strange men when women are alone.
- Family demand for constant updates in every sphere: Financial, personal, filial, domestic and so on.
- Monitoring motherhood and intervening in children's upbringing and education.

So far, discussion has focused on economic violence in a family context and on the indifference, inequality and discrimination evident in official policy. Several concrete examples derived from the interviews are presented below.

The women spoke about the criticism they encountered whenever they wanted to buy something for their children. When Hanaa, a divorced mother of two, was young, she had to curtail her studies because her parents wanted her to take care of her younger brothers. Hanaa, who is illiterate, is now deeply committed to her daughters'

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[9] The interviews also indicated that at times, some of the women who experienced economic violence wanted a divorce – an issue beyond the scope of the present study.

[10] Gift economy is described as part of an unofficial type of economy. Mauss ([1954] 2005) argues that despite the decline in gift giving in modern society, the custom is still prevalent and plays an important social role. He claims that gift law is an underlying force in every form of human association, as human behavior is founded on the need to achieve equilibrium and a gift embodies a kind of threefold obligation: Giving, receiving and giving in return.

[11] Supervision is not uniform; its scope varies in accordance with different sociological variables, such as the financial status, religiosity and education of the woman and her family.

education and hired a private tutor to help them. Her father opposed the idea, even though Hanaa did not ask for his financial help.

> …No, I will be strong, I told them not to interfere…I want my daughters to study, I told my father not to intervene… I could not study, so I'm letting her study…It's very important, but Father intervenes all the time…..I don't want them interfering; it's not his money.

The demand for regular updates on financial activity is also mentioned by Ulla, an educated mother of seven who became widowed after 25 years of marriage. She notes that she had to report to her brothers-in-law regarding her financial plans and the bureaucratic procedures she underwent to obtain the training stipend owed her late husband:

> I have to do several things. For example, he has a training stipend, so I need an order of probate… I told them so and made it clear. I do not take any steps without leaking some information, that is, giving them the information in stages, so that they understand that I'm not going there to claim my inheritance… It is indeed my right to do so, but for the sake of convenience, I'm doing something for their benefit and preventing conflict. I come to them and tell them which government office I visited and what I wanted to do… I present it all to them. I inform them about these matters, so they don't come and confront me later…

Ulla reports everything she does relating to her inheritance so that she can avoid the financial friction that often arises between widows and their husbands' families. The money to which she is entitled because her husband died is not clearly perceived as hers by her husband's family and she is forbidden to express any desire for it. Despite the blatant injustice of this situation and the emotional burden it entails, she must comply to avoid conflict.

The patrilocal principle renders the widow's experience even more complex: The new widow remains in the home in which she had lived with her husband, but it now belongs to her husband's family. Yahia-Younis (2006) and Abou-Tabickh (2008) argue that de facto enforcement of the patrilocal principle creates a form of forced migration for Palestinian women when they marry. Although they belong to the same national, cultural and religious group, it is evident that these women are constantly accompanied by a sense of alienation and marginality, as they are excluded from the local collective by a discourse of alienation.[12] Expanding on their arguments, I claim that this sense of alienation and marginality is intensified when a woman is widowed. Despite the widow's blood ties with her husband's family, to which her children are perceived to belong, she becomes more vulnerable without her spouse and her status becomes increasingly complex. Many of the widows in this study remained with their husbands' families but expressed uncertain feelings regarding ownership of their property and home.

The general housing problem and its concomitant exacerbation of the shortage of available land for building and residential use, together with haphazard registration of the subdivision of family land, often lead the husband's family to feel that the widow is holding onto their property, living on land that is not hers. As there are no official documents filed with regard to land, the widow has no legal recourse whatsoever and is left to fend for herself against her husband's family. Often her only alternative is to remain, guarding the property with her own body.

Nasrin, a widow and mother of a daughter, married at the relatively late age of 36 when she was financially independent and had an MA degree. After her marriage, her husband began building their home as part of a combined family project, in which she invested all the savings she acquired in a previous inheritance. Several years after their marriage, her husband died suddenly and left her with an unfinished home and in a problematic situation vis-à-vis his family. Despite poor relations with her husband's family and its failure to recognize her ownership of the house, she was legally compelled to remain living in the house to protect her and her daughter's rights:

> Yes, when we were married, he and his brother filed a building plan for this house. That's what saved me. It's registered in the building plan. They tried to drive me away but cannot do so legally… The plan is in his name and I have an inheritance order, so I own half the building… Now, I'm about to begin to dispute them in the court.

Under these circumstances, Nasrin not only had to cope with the loss of her husband and the difficulties of raising her daughter as a single parent, but also faced a daily battle of attrition with her husband's family. The continuous physical proximity did not make her life any easier, but she refused to move away because current legal arrangements do not protect her right of ownership over the property. As her attorneys offered no alternative plan, she remained a 'prisoner' in a hostile environment, subject to daily harassment inflicted by family members and exposed to an incessant psychological war against her.

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[12] Furthermore, because of the patrilocal principle, according to which women move to their husband's locality after marriage, they tend to own fewer assets and only a fraction of the land.

The situation of Palestinian single mothers reinforces Abu-Baker's (2007) claim that in a society characterized by limited resources and existential insecurity, mutual support among members of the family collective enables individuals to survive and develop. Under these circumstances, numerous women are unwillingly forced into a patriarchal family framework that provides them with support and assistance. Thus, as in previous studies that addressed Palestinian women (Abou-Tabickh, 2008; Hassan, 1999; Sa'ar, 2004; Yahia-Younis, 2006), I argue that national political arrangements engender local patriarchal developments that increase subordination and oppression of women, including manifestations of economic violence.

Inheritance

Over the past few years, many Palestinian Israeli women have been denied their share in the family inheritance, while others choose to forgo it. Inheritance issues are thus relevant to the range of economic violence practices perpetrated against women.

Inheritance is not only about property and wealth. Its gender-related aspects are intriguing, as it also concerns power relations, family control and matters of belonging and identity (Kreiczer-Levi, 2013). Family arrangements in Palestinian society in Israel should be addressed within a broader context that includes Israel's definition as a Western society. Smooha (2006) claims that in its own eyes and those of the world, Israeli society is perceived as Western. Nevertheless, Israel differs from the West in terms of the centrality and power of the family (see also Fogiel-Bijaoui, 1999). This is particularly evident with regard to Palestinian society in Israel, that evokes an ambivalent and sometimes antagonistic attitude toward the West on issues of culture and nationality (Kanaaneh, 2002; Smooha, 2006). In Israel, which Smooha (2006) defines as an ethnic democracy, personal status is defined along religious rather than civil lines[13] and family patterns take shape in a manner not entirely consistent with Western familism.[14] This duality is evident in inheritance laws, that allow heirs to approach either the Inheritance Registrar (in cases of consent), Family Court (in cases of a dispute) or, if all the heirs agree, a religious tribunal that may apply its own particularistic inheritance statutes (Hacker, 2010).

According to Shari'a law, a woman's right to inheritance is inferior to that of a man: A daughter's share in her father's estate is only half that of a son. Nevertheless, as reflected in a public campaign by the Women and Horizons Association,[15] it is evident that men in Arab families often limit the inheritance to a few male heirs – a norm grounded in a broader social conception according to which women have no right to receive their share in an inheritance. It thus emerges that family members appeal to the Shari'a court or to attorneys, where the women ostensibly "volunteer" to forgo their share in the inheritance in favor of their sons and brothers. In other cases, to avoid interfamilial disputes regarding division of the estate, parents draft wills according to Israeli civil law in which they bequeath most of the estate to their sons (Ali, 2007). The issue of women's inheritance reflects the status of women in Palestinian Israeli society and its various manifestations in other societies.

Hacker (2010) argues that there is a sharp dichotomy between the ongoing discrimination women experience in non-Western societies with regard to inheritance and the social realities prevailing in the West, where inheritance is a rare economic space in which women enjoy privilege, power and control. Although such inheritance laws are

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[13] In Israel, two judicial systems address family law: Civil and religious. In keeping with the decision to subordinate family law to religious law, the rabbinical, Shari'a, Druze and church courts are considered separate entities, each with its own regulations. As such, adjudication of family claims takes place in a bipolar space between religious courts and pluralistic secular judicial instances – a duality that increases violation of women's rights (regarding marriage, divorce, custody, alimony, etc.), complicates judicial processes and reduces women's trust in these legal systems.

[14] The term 'familism' refers to fertility rates, marriage age, divorce rates and so forth. In many of these categories the data in Israel does not correspond with those in other Western countries. Moreover, the centrality of the family in Israeli society differs from other Western countries. Several factors can explain this: the fact that marriage and divorce are subject to religious law, there is no civil law governing personal status, and family codes are anchored in each religion and mold familist practices (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 1999).

[15] A women's organization (Arabic: *Nisaa Wafaq*; Hebrew: *Nashim Veofaqim*) established in 2002 to advance the status of Palestinian women in Israel, who suffer deprivation and difficult living conditions. Its chief objective is to provide social and economic tools to facilitate women's coping with difficulties in various aspects of life, while familiarizing them with all that concerns their religious and civil rights. The organization's positions do not contradict those of religion or tradition. On the contrary, they are based on the Quran and the words of the Prophet Muhammad, along with the civil laws of the State of Israel. Prominent Muslim clerics assist the organization in reinforcing its positions and demands.

nominally egalitarian, the data demonstrate that even in the West, cultural patriarchal practices persist and limit women's inheritance rights (Hacker, 2010:1).

A 2007 Women and Horizons survey indicates that 95% of Palestinian women in Israel forgo their share of inheritances (Ivri, 2007). Sandberg and Hofri-Winogradow (2012) claim that a daughter's renunciation of her inheritance can be analyzed in two ways: On the one hand, rejection embodies her free choice and is embedded in the social structure dictated by Islam and by her social surroundings, that tend to preserve property within patrilineal frameworks. Renunciation is thus perceived as a package deal in which the woman exchanges her rights to the real estate of her family of origin for other financial or social favors.[16] From this point of view, perception of rejection of inheritance as a reflection of discrimination is a Western attempt to impose concepts of equality that were created in Western surroundings. On the other hand, the practice of renunciation is liable to constitute the result of women's acquiescence to realities that they cannot change. The women do not want to be cast out of their families, environment and the ethnic and national group to which they belong. They fear the hostility and physical and economic hardship to which they will be exposed in case of refusal to forgo the inheritance. Hence women's absolute renunciation of any part of the inheritance reflects a patriarchal social structure, wherein a woman cannot survive without her male relatives. Even when no genuine force or explicit threat is applied, feminine acquiescence to the patterns of social organization that reflect male superiority is liable to reflect symbolic violence that the culture imprints both on the rulers and the ruled – and as such designates institution of overt economic violence.

This trend, that contravenes international legal dicta regarding equality of women's rights, also contradicts accepted patterns in many Western countries, according to which the principles of international law take precedence over conflicting customs and religious practices. Moreover, even from an Islamic feminist point of view, this social custom contradicts the basic attitude of Islam towards women and the explicit instructions of Shari'a law (Ali, 2007). In this context, the issue of voluntary renunciation should be assessed with regard to the claims of Ottonelli and Torresi (2013), who warn that the language of choice and free will has often been considered suspect in some feminist circles, who believe it is exploited to conceal real societal constraints imposed on women in their decision making, assigning responsibility for any resulting disadvantage to the purportedly free choice made by individual women. Such objections would be inappropriate to the argument advanced in the present study, however, that aims precisely at scrutinizing and challenging such linguistic exploitation.

The issue of inheritance is mentioned often at the women's own initiative either directly or as part of an example of discrimination and inequality among female family members or of differences in rights between women and men in Palestinian society. Marwa, 31, academically educated, married and the mother of two, explains how the inheritance was divided up in her family: "Father told us that we [the daughters] would not receive anything because we are a traditional family. Fathers bequeath to their sons, not daughters. By the way, that's discrimination!" I asked whether she voiced her views when the subject was brought up and she replied with a laugh: "My job was not to be part of the discussion…"

Marwa, like many other participants, objects to the accepted practices according to which estates are bequeathed to males only. Moreover, she even defines such practices explicitly as manifestations of discrimination. Nevertheless, like other participants, she accepts the situation and did not express any opposition or protest. Other women consented or resigned themselves to the norm of denying inheritances to women. Duaa, 30, an academically educated married woman with two children, explains why she refuses to accept a share in the family inheritance: "When they divide up the inheritance, I don't want anything, because it's going to cause strife among the brothers and I don't want to be involved in quarrels with them." Duaa fears that if she did ask for a share, her failure to conform with conventional codes of behavior would cause her to lose her brothers' potential support.

Other participants explained that they believe that their brothers deserve a share in the inheritance more than they do. One of them, Bayan, 34, academically educated, married and the mother of two, said: "I consider my parents' investment in me before I got married to be an inheritance." Bayan challenges the claim of discrimination against daughters in inheritance practices, claiming that denial of a share in land and housing is counterbalanced by education, dowry and other items (such as household goods) they receive from their parents. Nevertheless, the extent to which receipt of an inheritance as a woman is considered violation of prevailing norms is evident in remarks by Yara, 27, academically educated, married and the mother of two, who told me anecdotally that she knows that her mother received an inheritance in her day. She immediately added that "it was particularly rare for a daughter to receive anything" and went on to say that today, in her husband's family, things are different: "For example, my father-in-law did not do so, that is, he gave to his sons and not his daughters."

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[16] For example, as described above, she promises that her family of origin will support her and her children in case of divorce.

The interviews indicate that although state law in Israel has become more egalitarian, customary practice precludes women from exercising their inheritance rights. Many Palestinian Israeli women realize that even though Israeli law supports them nominally, their rights are not guaranteed. In this case and others, the normative context and cultural codes continue to exert an influence and define the social order, rendering Israeli law null and void for the most part, even among people who broke through family and community barriers in certain discernible ways (such as single mothers or educated and/or working women).

Hacker's (2010) study of inheritance procedures in Jewish society in Israel did not include an investigation into the practices and perceptions of judges in Israel's Muslim, Christian, or Druze religious tribunals. She does claim, however, that according to Palestinian feminists in Israel, the Muslim tribunals (Shari'a courts), that largely govern family law, do not attempt to ameliorate the discriminatory effects of Islamic law on women in the inheritance context.

Conclusion

This study presented various manifestations of economic violence that women experience in Palestinian society in Israel. At first, I addressed the realities with which Palestinian Israeli single mothers cope: They often lack resources, have difficulty supporting themselves and their children independently and are compelled to share living space with their extended families, for various reasons, rendering them the object of supervision and intervention and the target of economic violence.

Another context of economic violence I considered is inheritance, that was shown to reflect a traditional patriarchal vision of the family. Land and property belong to men and are bequeathed from fathers to sons. For Palestinian Israeli women, inheritance is a space in which women are excluded, discriminated against, exploited and marginalized, a space in which they experience economic violence perpetrated by their close relatives. This situation contrasts with Hacker's (2010) view of inheritance as a space in which Western and Jewish women enjoy privilege, power and control.

Olufunmilayo (2008) claims that improvement of women's economic rights requires long-term strategies aimed at challenging the prevailing structures. It demands the involvement of government agencies and stakeholders at all levels. Different strategies may be required for the various cultural contexts in which economic abuse occurs and a combination of strategies may yield longer-lasting solutions.

An analysis of Israeli public policy shows that besides offering too little, it is based on criteria that limit the ability of Palestinian Israeli women to gain institutional support of any kind. The current policy and proposed reforms for the Palestinian Israeli population do not account for the unique social circumstances of Palestinian Israeli women in general and Palestinian Israeli single mothers in particular. Even when Israeli public discourse encourages discussion of women's rights, these women remain transparent to both policymakers and shapers of public discourse. The cases described show that we should focus on the structural complexity at the interface of state law, religious law and custom and determine how the women manipulate this complexity.

The State of Israel does not enforce the law regarding these practices and others (such as polygamy[17]), thereby enabling them to manipulate the system. The bifurcated nature of the legal system encourages behavior that conventional legislation prohibits. Such behavior is treated as if it were external to the legal system and as such continues to constitute a valid component of the "other's" cultural norms and traditions (Abu-Rabia, 2011).

The apparent approach (both formal rulings and informal behavior) to the resulting interactions demonstrates the importance of empirical investigations of religious tribunals in Western countries (Hacker, 2010). In accomplishing this goal, we need to remember that the situation is rendered more complex by personal distress and reluctance to seek out government assistance. Together with the ongoing absence of Israeli law enforcement in Palestinian Israeli areas, these factors often prevent *de facto* protection of Palestinian Israeli women (Meler, 2014).

Finally, the above manifestations of economic violence against Palestinian Israeli women may serve as an example of the heavy price women pay when multicultural approaches in Western countries are not supported by complementary social policies (see, e.g., Okin, 1999). By disregarding such practices for the sake of "'cultural sensitivity" and "multiculturalism," Israel actually perpetuates them, rendering Palestinian women "invisible" and vulnerable to economic violence.

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[17] According to Abu-Rabia (2011), the incidence of polygamy among the Naqab Bedouins has increased over the past few decades. State authorities avoid enforcing criminal law in this respect because polygamy is sanctioned by local cultural norms.

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