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Coping, Closure, and Gendered Life Transitions

Palestinians' Responses to the Erosion of Male Breadwinning Work

Fafo

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Contents

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Executive Summary

This report examines how Palestinian women and men are coping as they navigate key life transitions into adulthood. Building on a decade of longitudinal study of Palestinian coping strategies, this report examines the school-to-work-to-marriage transition (Singerman, 2007) in the West Bank in a context of continued closure, fragmentation, economic stagnation, impoverishment and the erosion of male-breadwinning work. Given the limited economic prospects of many Palestinian households, this report contributes to a deeper understanding of how young Palestinians and their families manage these challenging, time-consuming and frequently-costly life transitions into post-secondary education, the labor force, and marriage and family life.

While Palestinian women and youth have made important gains in higher education, the West Bank labor market and economy have been more fragile and volatile – unable to grow and absorb much of the labor force. Based on qualitative individual, expert and focus group interviews and statistics, the first part of the report examines how each gender is faring in terms of higher educational attainment, labor force participation and the age at first marriage, as well as providing insight into the effects which these social changes are prompting within households and communities. The advances and challenges, which each gender encounters, bear implications for Palestinian households and communities, but also for development policy makers as they assess and design their humanitarian and development programs not only to 'do no harm' but to promote a more equitable redistribution of social power.

In the absence of a Palestinian state, Palestinian households, families and kinship structures are arguably the most important social institution - providing essential caring work, a social safety net, a source of identity and (re)distributing wealth and resources. The livelihood crisis, which began early in 2000 coinciding with the imposition of strict closures and the outbreak of the second intifada, has meant that many poor and vulnerable households have lost their means of supporting themselves. Family and kinship networks have been exhausted; household indebtedness is sizable, and international and humanitarian aid has been unable to fill the livelihood gaps or losses. Households have increasingly invested in higher education with the aim of securing more stable sources of income. They have also found alternative marriage patterns to contribute to these ends (Muhanna, 2010, 175), and marriage preferences have altered significantly with the ideal husband or wife holding both a higher education degree and a stable income (Mitchell, 2009). The pursuit of higher education and development of alternative marriage arrangements have become key coping strategies challenging the traditional patriarchal and generational family hierarchies and practices.

In terms of key findings, despite important academic achievements, neither men, nor women have been able to advance appreciably in the Palestinian labor market. Unemployment levels in 2006 were higher than before 2000 and reveal important gender differences: with highly-educated women being the largest group of unemployed women and having unemployment rates more than double the largest group of unemployed men (who have low levels of formal education attainment). Men who were employed informally inside Israel were particularly

hard hit both by the loss of employment and falling wages. There is also evidence that both men and women are withdrawing from the labor market.

In terms of the demographic trends related to marriage, between 1997 and 2008, a notable rise in the average age at first marriage occurs in the West Bank for both men (from 23.0 to 25.4 years) and women (from 18.0 to 19.8 years) and with considerable variation from district to district. While the pursuit of higher education is likely one contributing factor, during interviews, many young men and their parents revealed that they struggle to find work and save the considerable sum of money involved in betrothal and marriage.

While expectations that Palestinian men secure decently-remunerated work have eased as closure and fragmentation persist, the male breadwinner norm has yet to completely disappear. There remains the expectation that men will provide for their families and that young men will find work and save a 'nest egg' to marry and start their own families. These expectations are a source of pressure on men who sometimes experience their inability to provide for their families or future families as personal failure rather than a more profound structural problem.

List of Tables

Introduction

This report emerges as part of a decade of on-going study[1] of Palestinians' coping strategies under Israel's closure regime and continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In conducting fieldwork in 2008, we encountered a number of young unmarried men in their twenties in the rural West Bank and observed considerable despair and hopelessness amongst them, as well as to varying degrees amongst older men. These surprising observations prompted a number of questions related to the effects of the closure and gendered and generational vulnerabilities as a result of both closure and social roles and expectations in Palestinian society which led to additional fieldwork in 2009. How, for instance, has the loss of Palestinian male breadwinning work inside Israel affected Palestinian men and women of different ages and at different points of their lives? How has this structural change affected intra-household dynamics between the genders and generations? How are younger generations coping with key life transitions into higher study, the labor market and family formation?

Before proceeding further, however, it is critical to provide a quick overview of the structural transformations which the 1967 Israeli Occupation introduced in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (WBGS). Historically, the 1967 Occupation simultaneously undermined the Palestinian economy of the WBGS, and allowed Palestinian, predominantly-male workers access to the better-remunerated Israeli labor market to perform unskilled and semi-skilled work. These wage-labor opportunities reinforced the importance of male breadwinning work and to some degree, patriarchal structures within households and families. At the same time, women's work particularly in the more-labor intensive sectors like manufacturing, which was hard hit by the occupation and border controls, began to decline. In the early 1990s, Israel changed its policy of open access to its labor markets – marking the beginning of new closure policies (Roy, 2002b, 20). Over the nineties, while the severity of the closures practiced varied considerably, access to the Israeli labor market by Palestinian laborers was reduced considerably[2]. However, with the escalation of hostilities late in 2000, access to the Israeli labor market has been gravely reduced. At the same time, the Palestinian economy has not been allowed to grow and develop and teeters on the brink of bankruptcy more heavily dependent on international aid than ever, whilst in the West Bank land confiscation proceeds, along with continued settlement, the construction of bypass roads and the separation wall and the Gaza Strip is held in a state of siege[3].

Recent in-depth examinations of the gendered and generational dynamics and effects of household coping strategies form the basis of this report. The present report builds on the 2009 coping study and aims at probing deeper into these dynamics and life transitions and locating them within the broader demographic changes occurring. This report draws on

[1] See: Mitchell (2009); Hasselknippe and Tveit (2007); Sletten and Pedersen (2003); Egset and Endresen (2002).
[2] Note, however, that Israel's efforts at controlling and reducing Palestinian laborers' access to Israeli labor markets led many Palestinians, who were unable to secure a work permit, to sneak across into Israel. However, with the construction of the separation wall and tighter control of borders, it has become more difficult for Palestinian workers to sneak in.
[3] Unfortunately, due to the extreme closure regime inflicted on the Gaza Strip, the author of this report was unable to enter Gaza, and hence, the experiences of households in the Gaza Strip have not been included in this report.

some 100 qualitative interviews in 2007, on a dozen individual, expert and focus group interviews conducted in 2009 with men and women in the rural West Bank and on statistical data and secondary sources on trends related to higher education, labor force participation and the average age at first marriage (as an indicator of new household formation). In examining men and women's achievements in each of these transitions, I have drawn on time-series data and statistics to highlight changes over time. That being said, much of the labor force participation draws largely from existing statistics, namely quarterly labor force participation reports.

In light of Palestinian women's important achievements in higher education and the claims that Palestinian men are retreating from the labor force and public, I have adopted a simple, working hypothesis of 'men's retreat/women's advance', which serves partly as a rhetorical device. The point is to maintain a focus on the different achievements and setbacks experienced by each gender. That being said, one should be careful about generalizing and treating 'men' or 'women' as simple undifferentiated categories when in fact issues of class, region, kin, religious and political affiliation, and land-ownership are also at play.

In terms of youth and generational issues, the transition into adulthood for youth is considered a crucial period of life when young men and women must make choices and decisions which have long-term implications and often in a relatively short period of time (du Bois-Reymond and Stauber, 2005, 63). This transition or integration process which young men and women go through to become adults is frequently referred to as the 'school-to-work' paradigm in many European countries. In the Middle East, however, due to the imperative that youth marry to become adults and due to the high cost of marriage, Singerman argues for the expanded paradigm of a 'school-to-work-to-marriage transition'(Singerman, 2007, 41). While this report does not focus exclusively on youth, it has been organized into the following sections to reflect generational differences and challenges, namely: Palestinians' pursuit of higher education; their labor force participation; and changing marriage practices and the transition to marriage and family life. There is evidence to suggest that youth are making these life transitions later today than in the previous decades.

Why does it matter if youth need more time to get an education, find a job and start a family? Isn't it a positive development if fewer people are engaging in early marriage practices, marrying later and having fewer children, for instance? And whose business is it anyway? The point here is to examine how Palestinian society and social institutions like the household are changing with a view to informing local and international development, humanitarian assistance and international aid (which the PA and Palestinian society have become reliant on). International aid programs affect and are affected by those broader changes resulting in different forms of socio-economic development. Ideally, in developing and designing aid programs to Palestinians, one would consider the gender and generational ramifications of different types of aid and assistance – out of commitments to the 'do no harm' principle and to the promotion of gender equality, but also in terms of 'better-case' scenarios, out of the

possibility of contributing to policies which encourage more equitable redistribution of social power.

At the same time, families in the Arab world are experiencing important transformations as new patterns of marriage and family formation emerge across the region (Rashad et al, 2005, 1). Johnson, Abu Nahleh and Moors (2009) article on Palestinian weddings and war is a fine illustration of how marriage and wedding celebrations have been transformed from the first to the second intifada. Islah Jad's (2009) article on the politics of group weddings in Palestine is another important contribution. Muhanna's (2010) research on gender and agency in the Gaza Strip characterizes the new approach to marriage in the Gaza Strip as a 'project for livelihood survival' unsettling patriarchal and generational hierarchies within families.

In examining these key life transitions, this report focuses on both difficult integration issues (like the challenge of finding a job in the labor market) and the more expensive transitions involved (i.e. providing post-secondary education, constructing housing, and mobilizing resources for betrothal and establishing one's own household). The gendered norms, roles and expectations of each of these transitions will also feature prominently. While at some points in this report I will treat 'men' and 'women' separately, the lives of men and women are in many respects mutually dependent and intertwined particularly in families, households and social networks. In light of the limited power of the 'state in formation' or the Palestinian Authority (PA), the frail Palestinian economy and a community which is being fragmented and cantonized, the household plays and assumes important roles in social provision and power.

The Pursuit of Post-Secondary Education

"Obtaining a university degree is a high priority for any Palestinian today." (Ibrahim Abu Lughod, 2000, 85)

Over the last two decades, since the outbreak of the first intifada, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have gained important achievements in education in spite of the difficult socio-economic and political conditions and strict closures. Fafo's last household coping strategies report highlighted many of these educational achievements specifically related to higher education, as well as some social change prompted by higher education. This section will start with a brief summary of those achievements before moving to a brief historic overview of the emergence of tertiary education in WBGS, as well as outlining some of the regional trends in education. This section will then examine educational enrollment and completion rates, the costs of pursuing post-secondary education, and finally discuss the social changes related to burgeoning tertiary education amongst both men and women.

To briefly summarize findings from Fafo's last coping report, Palestinian households have invested a greater share of their income in higher education and make tremendous sacrifices to provide higher education for their members even as household consumption rates have decreased and more households have fallen below the poverty line (Mitchell, 2009). Women, in particular, have made important strides in higher education, and they now outnumber and academically outstrip their men counterparts in the disciplines and academic programs which women pursue. These are limited to essentially education, humanities and the social sciences. While women generally require a post-secondary degree to qualify for socially-acceptable forms of work in the public sector, formal education is valued in and of itself for daughters and sons – not merely because it may lead to better-remunerated jobs. Sayre and Al-Botmeh point out that "post-secondary education is the most critical factor in raising a woman's chances of gaining formal employment" (2009, 19).

Marriage preferences have also changed to reflect the growing importance of higher education. Grooms, brides and their families seek a spouse who has or is pursuing higher education and ideally has stable employment. Younger women who marry before graduating generally continue their studies after marrying and even after giving birth with mothers-in-law and other extended family members helping to care for babies and small children. Married women in their 30s and 40s with several children also pursue higher education. Part of the emphasis on higher education for women appears linked both to regional trends and to the changed macro-economic situation in which West Bank households increasingly require two salaries to live. In small and rural communities, women have very few paid work opportunities outside the public sector where higher education is generally required.

In the Arab World, important educational gains for girls and women have been made over the last few decades with girls' outstripping boys in academic performance (a point to which I will return below in the discussion of educational enrollment and attainment rates). As the 2005 Arab Human Development Report points out:

> Female enrolment in university education has risen, yet women are still concentrated in fields such as literature, the humanities and the social sciences where they constitute the majority. These are the subjects in least demand by employers. By contrast, enrolment rates for females in fields that lead to jobs, such as engineering and science, are noticeably lower. Again, this trend runs counter to Arab public opinion which favours letting women students choose their fields of specialization (UNDP, 2005, 7).

Based on our fieldwork in rural settings, young Palestinian women are generally encouraged to pursue higher study in the humanities, literature and the social sciences – all fields in which there is less labor market demand. Some parents have even complained that girls with high grades are rarely if ever encouraged to pursue science, medicine or engineering (Mitchell, 2009, 41). Such findings also suggest the need to examine more closely the school guidance provided to students. To return to and better understand some of the above trends and gains for Palestinians, it would be helpful to first briefly examine the development of higher education in the WBGS.

Prior to the establishment of Birzeit University in 1972, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had to travel abroad to pursue a university education. Studying abroad, however, could be both costly and risky. For those unable to secure a scholarship, studying abroad could be a costly endeavor - particularly for students from lower-income households. In terms of the risk of studying abroad, the Israeli authorities frequently practiced a policy of denying university graduates the right to return to the WBGS. Between the 1970s and 1990s, however, several Palestinian universities opened in the WBGS, accompanied by a sharp increase in university enrollment in the WBGS (PCBS 1998, 58). Between the academic years of 1979/1980 and 2000/2001, student registrations increased as follows:

- by 3.9 times at Birzeit University (from 1392 to 5447);
- by 4.5 times at Najah University (from 1873 to 8444);
- by 2.5 times at Bethlehem University (from 809 to 2057);
- by 5.8 times at Hebron University (from 475 to 2751);
- by 26.45 times at the Islamic University in Gaza (from 393 to 10396) (Romani, 2003, 4).

While thousands of students continued to enroll in universities and colleges outside the WBGS, the core site for the acquisition of higher education underwent a spatial change or transfer to the Occupied Territories. "This relocation also greatly facilitated the accessibility of higher education to women of the Occupied Territories, as reflected in their relatively high share of the total student body in the Palestinian universities since the early 1980s" (Rosenfeld, 2004, 26). As one women's movement activist shared, "[a]fter 1991, when the first intifada had calmed down somewhat, many girls started going to university. Many went to the Open University where you can work and study and pay yourself for your studies."

Distance education programs offered by the Open University are not only popular amongst women, but have also made higher education accessible to people outside the major urban centers. The Open University has expanded to become the largest higher education institution with over 46,000 students at 24 education and study centers across the WBGS (Ministry of Education 2005 cited in Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009, 19). Even when closures and checkpoints are strictly enforced, and mobility and access to university campus is restricted, students are able to continue their studies. Lower tuition fees and travel costs associated with the Open University have made the cost of higher education more affordable for women, but also for students from less-privileged backgrounds and more distant areas – enabling a degree of democratization of higher education (Abu-Lughod, 2000).

In terms of some of the policy shifts which have supported women's pursuit of higher education, following the arrival of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the Palestinian Ministry of Education introduced an important policy change:

> It should be noted that the Ministry of Education has, for the first time, allowed schoolgirls who are engaged or married to return to the classroom to complete their compulsory school education. During the years of Israeli occupation, it had become customary to remove girls from school if they were to get engaged or married, and they would rarely, if ever, return to complete their education (WCLAC, 2005, 15).

More recently, however, the Ministry of Education introduced a new policy where student university grants will be converted into loans. Depending on how it is implemented, this policy will affect full-time students in both distance-education and campus-based academic programs and may lead to lowered enrolment rates generally, as well as triggering some students to opt for distance-education programs which are less costly.

Educational Enrollment and Completion Rates

Palestinian girls and boys have generally made important gains with respect to secondary and tertiary education (Cf. Table 1). Both genders spend more time attending educational institutions as evidenced by the School Life Expectancy (SLE) rate, which represents the average number of years a student spends going to school. The SLE rose from 12.4 years for girls in 2000 to 13.7 years in 2007, while boys' increases in SLE went from 12.0 to 12.7 years respectively (UNESCO, 2009, 220).

Table 1: Gross Enrollment Rates (GER) by Level of Education for 2000 and 2007

Gross Enrollment Rates (GER) by Level of Education for 2000 and 2007		
Level/Type of Education	**2000**	**2007**
Primary	108	80
Secondary	82	92
Tertiary	26	46

Source: UNESCO, 2009, 196.

While primary enrollment rates have dropped (a point I will return to below), Table 1 indicates a notable rise in gross enrollment rates for both secondary and tertiary education. UNESCO time series data for the Palestinian Territories indicates that tertiary enrollment for both genders was 277,000 students in 2000 and rose to 336,000 in 2005 (a 21.3% increase), while the Gender Parity Index shifted from 0.92 indicating a slightly-higher male enrolment in 2000 to 1.03 in 2005 indicating a slightly-higher female enrolment (ibid, 227). Enrollment rates in tertiary education have reached nearly 50 percent of eligible youth with more students staying in school longer, and three times as many students attending college and university than just a decade ago (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009, 18). In terms of the quality of education, a recent UN-ESCWA report found that while "the overall quality of education available to women in Palestine is variable, access to and participation in education is rising" (UN-ESCWA, 2009, v).

These gains and trends are particularly impressive in light of the difficult economic situation of many households and Israeli policies which frequently hindered, if not openly targeted, universities and institutes of higher education: students, campuses and access to campuses. During the first intifada, the Israeli authorities practiced a form of blanket punishment of all educational institutions – from daycares to public schools to universities - effectively closing them down for several years. During the second intifada, the Israeli authorities practiced more targeted, albeit frequent interference on and around campuses.

The drop in primary enrollment is considerable and requires urgent, further study. A 2008 Save the Children UK report on child development indicators between 2000 and 2007 attributed this drop in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to the continued conflict and closure regime: "school closures and movement restrictions have led to a situation where one in four primary school children are no longer enrolled (from 97% enrolment in 1999)" (SCF-UK, 2008, 13).

Another measure of educational achievement is literacy rates which have also increased for both men and women. Women's literacy rates increased from 82.8% to 89.8% in 2006, while men's rates increased by 2.9% and reached 97.1% for the same period. The percentage of persons (15 years and over) with a Bachelor's degree or higher has also increased for both men and women: from 8.4% of men and 3.8% for women in 2000 to 9.6% of men and 6.2% of women in 2006 (PCBS, 2007, 77).

The increase in men's post-secondary educational enrollment rates is partly related to the loss of access to better-remunerated Israeli labor market where Palestinian laborers were employed in 'unskilled' and/or 'semi-skilled' jobs (and where holding higher education did not result in either higher wages or more 'skilled' work). In the past, many young men opted to work as laborers in Israel even if for only a few years, rather than pursuing higher education (which did not necessarily result in employment, nor employment in one's specialty or well-remunerated employment). So, the loss of access to the Israeli labor market, combined with the local labor market opportunities in the Palestinian economy - largely positions within the PA which generally require higher education[4] – have resulted in young men pursuing formal credentials through higher education.

As already stated, the greatest increases in tertiary enrollment and completion rates are amongst women. While many women become engaged and even marry during their university studies, they generally continue their studies even after marriage and childbirth with the support of the extended family network which emphasizes higher education. This is part of a strategy which Palestinian women are using to make themselves into potential income earners, and this strategy is not limited to younger women but also includes some older women who are married with several children.

Not all Palestinians who wish to pursue higher education, however, are able to. While conducting the fieldwork for this report, we encountered some cases where young people had to leave secondary school, in particular, because their households could no longer support them. In one case, a divorced mother of two in Hebron who simply didn't have the economic means to support, feed, clothe and protect her two children married her daughter off at the age of 16. The mother also felt that she could no longer protect her daughter from the aggression of the nearby settlers in the Old City. In another case, a 16-year-old top student – the eldest son of a permanently-disabled man - left secondary school to support the entire household which included his mother, three-year twin sisters and other young siblings. As already stated, the drop in primary enrollment is a worrying development which needs further investigation and monitoring.

The cost of pursuing higher education

As stated earlier, men, women and their households continue to make tremendous investments in post-secondary education despite limited household income and a faltering, fettered local economy. These investments are also notable given the relatively-large families with an average of four to five children per household. The change in marriage preferences for brides and grooms also means that post-secondary education becomes a more important criterion in spouse selection which also exerts some social pressure on individuals.

[4] Note that only lower-level security positions do not require higher education although these positions are open almost exclusively to men.

To pursue higher education involves significant investments of time, funds and other resources by the students themselves and the households who support them. Whether time is spent travelling to campus, studying, working to earn tuition fees or pay-off education-related debts, a four-year undergraduate degree inevitably involves a significant investment of time. Financially, the largest expenses incurred were related to tuition and transportation costs even though students needed funds for books, stationery, lunch, clothing and other incidentals. In many households, when a number of children are of university age over a period of time, this financial burden can be very heavy. Several fathers of university students expressed also a mental burden associated with trying to figure out where to come up with the funds needed to pay the tuition for two, three or four children at the same time. Many mothers sold off any remaining gold they might have, while others turned to group-guaranteed loans or micro-credit programs to come up with tuition fees.

The following chart gives some indication of the costs associated with putting one student through university for a semester. Costs, of course, vary somewhat from one academic program to the next depending on the cost of the program itself, the materials needed, whether there are many laboratory experiments and so on.

Table 2: A Sample of Higher Education Expenses in the West Bank

Type of Expense	Students living at home but studying on campus	Students living at home but studying via distance education	Student living away from home studying science
Tuition per semester	1200-1500 ILS ($310 - $385 USD)	1200ILS/240JD ($310 USD)	$500-600USD
Transportation	3000 ILS ($775 USD)	750ILS (commuting once per week) ($ 193USD)	500ILS (food & transportation) ($ 128USD)
Food	-	-	
Rent	-	-	$50USD
Books and supplies	300 ILS ($77 USD)	300 ILS ($77 USD)	300-400ILS ($77 - $103 USD)
Sub-total per semester	**4500 – 4800 ILS ($1160 – $1237 USD)**	**2250 ILS ($580 USD)**	**3008 – 3420 ILS ($ 755 - $881 USD)**

To illustrate the burden on households who have a number of university students at the same time, one of the households interviewed has five of their seven daughters who were all studying at university while our fieldwork was conducted. Two of these daughters were married – meaning that the daughters' husbands and/or in-laws were responsible for supporting them and paying the costs.

The household's eldest daughter finished high school, married and is the only daughter not pursuing a higher degree. The household's second oldest daughter is married with three children and has continued to study Arabic towards a Bachelor's degree at the Open University even after marrying and having children. She travels to the University's Ramallah campus twice a week, and her mother-in-law and sister-in-law look after the children when she is away. The household's third daughter is also married with two children and also studies geography at the Open University - travelling two to three times a week to the Ramallah campus. Her husband has no female relatives to help her look after the children, so her mother helps her with the children when she is at the university. Her husband is a teacher in a nearby village and covers her university fees. Both of these married daughters hope to get a job to contribute to the family income when they finish their studies.

The household's 23-year-old daughter is unmarried, lives at home and studies geography at the Open University commuting to campus twice weekly. When she is at home, she helps with the housework. Her father pays her tuition fees and other expenses. The household's 20-year-old daughter studies math at the Open University and hopes to become a teacher. She is engaged and will get married next year, and says she will continue her education after the wedding even if she has kids. She also hopes to get a job after graduating and would like to work even when she has children. The household's sixth daughter is 19 years old, unmarried and studies economics at the Open University. Her father also covers her fees and related expenses. She was at the university the day we visited her household. The seventh and youngest daughter graduated from high school but had to postpone beginning her studies at the Open University until next year because her parents couldn't afford to support four university students at the same time. The father states that it costs 1500 NIS per semester per student for tuition at the Open University – not including the transportation costs. To earn the necessary tuition, cover transportation and support the regular household costs, the father sneaks into Israel and lives in very bad conditions - sleeping outside, not eating very well, exposed to the elements and with the constant risk of being caught, fined and jailed by the police.

As the example of the above household indicates, when a woman university student marries, the cost and responsibility for supporting her to finish that education are transferred onto her husband and his family. In fact, this responsibility constitutes an important aspect of the negotiations related to betrothal between the two families. While this condition is not always recorded in the marriage contract, it is usually agreed upon verbally during these negotiations with several family members from both sides present to witness this agreement. This condition appears from our fieldwork to be exercised in the north, central and southern parts of the West Bank. There were also several cases of poor, struggling households who when negotiating their daughter's marriage contract, insisted upon the groom's family supporting their daughter's continued education. Take, for instance, the following example of a household where the father has been without regular employment for several years. This household's eldest daughter is married and studies history in the Open University, while their second eldest daughter is married and studies mathematics at a nearby university.

[Interviewer: How did you manage to organize it so that your two married daughters could continue to study even though they got married?] Education was a pre-condition for the marriage; the girls themselves insisted upon it, and their husbands also wanted them to study…. *[Was the educational pre-condition written into the marriage contract?]* Not in our first daughter's but in our second daughter's contract. She insisted on it. When they went to write and sign the marriage contract, our daughter told the judge to put it in the contract even though she had agreed on this before with her fiancé. She is a strong girl with a strong character.

As this quote indicates, the right of the household's two daughters to continue to pursue their higher studies was a pre-condition of the marriage agreement between the families. This pre-condition was supported by both the young women themselves and their respective fiancés, and one of the daughters even exercised her right to list this condition in the marriage contract.

Social Change associated with Increasing Number of Higher Education Graduates

As more people pursue higher education and women in particular, there appear to be a number of associated social changes. Girls and women are better able to express themselves and are more knowledgeable about their rights (as the last example of the young woman who insisted that her continued education be included in the marriage contract demonstrates). For many girls and women, attending classes on campus – even if only on a weekly basis – has led to many being more mobile and more accustomed to dealing with the outside world. Women respondents indicated that they felt more respect from their husbands, fathers and male kin generally, as well as feeling that there is more respect, support and acceptance for women who work outside the home. Based on our interviews with households with different ideological perspectives, these changes have occurred broadly across Palestinian West Bank society although there is some variation. In the southern Hebron area, for instance, more conservative families felt that it is acceptable for Palestinian women to work as teachers in girls' schools or in clinics with women and children where there is very little contact with men. As stated earlier, marriage preferences have also changed to reflect the importance of higher education when selecting a spouse. These changes have also prompted considerable discussion within Palestinian society and within households. Take, for instance, the following conversation during one of our interviews:

[Mother to the researcher:] Why are you asking all these questions? I am sure if you come back here in a few years, you will find no changes here.

[Interviewer:] But you had to quit school when you were 14, and your daughter wants to take higher education and be an engineer.

[Mother:] Yes it is true. It was difficult for girls to get an education before. It is good now when all the girls are studying and can get an education.

[Interviewer to the daughter:] Do you think you can combine education with marriage?

[Daughter:] I cannot answer. [She says diplomatically looking at her parents who have different opinions on this question]

[Mother:] If a man comes here and wants to marry our daughter, and he says she can continue her education, why not marry?

[Father:] I think she should finish her education before she gets married.

[Daughter:] I tend to agree with my father.

[Mother:] I think she can get married and study at the same time.

[Daughter:] I am single now, and I think I am busy all the time and find it hard to find enough time to study. So, how am I going to find enough time if I have a husband and a baby and a lot of housework to do?

The above conversation is suggestive of the ways in which life transitions into adulthood are changing and prompting discussion. How should individuals and families best organize and plan these transitions? Should young women finish their studies before getting married, for instance? Or is it best to get engaged and married while one is still a university student? These are but a few of the questions being discussed within the walls of Palestinian households.

In terms of religious discourse, during the first intifada, many people used to cite religious verses or traditions to try to prevent women from working or studying. However, many women shared that these more conservative interpretations within Islam occur less often today. In fact, a number of Muslim religious leaders clearly stated that women should be educated. As one woman activist shared:

> You know, in religion, you can find everything; you can find something that says that women shouldn't work, and you can also find things in religion that suggest that she should work and be educated. However, girls are also better educated about what Islam actually says and what it doesn't say – so, they're better able to engage with these things when they come up. A lot of Hamas women, for instance, also work and study.

Sometimes, however, broad social change is slow-going leading to frustrating situations. Some women graduates in the Hebron area shared that their families and fathers, in particular, continue to intervene during the betrothal process and fail to listen to and recognize their daughters' voices and wishes in the process. This situation has frequently occurred when women university students have negotiated and agreed on the betrothal process with their prospective grooms; however, once the prospective groom approaches the woman's family, frequently, what the couple has agreed to is thrown out by the woman's father – sometimes leading to no engagement. In such cases, the woman's father frequently insists on the future groom spending more money on the betrothal by insisting on additional

gold, furniture, or larger and/or more costly celebrations. When these young men and their families are unable to meet these financial demands, the marriage negotiations frequently come to an end.

Certainly, the visibility of so many women studying and of more women working effects how people view women and their roles in society. While not all of these effects will necessarily be positive (i.e., a negative, conservative backlash can also be triggered), they do deserve further study. The effects on women who try to combine full-time employment with housework and caring duties also need further study. Our fieldwork noted generally optimism amongst young women about combining work and family life. However, many women also experienced stress from trying to meet so many expectations at home and at work. In some households, expectations and standards have been relaxed somewhat so that women are not expected to cook a hot meal everyday or only do laundry once a week. Other women tried to keep up with their studies and housework by sleeping less. Others had a daughter or other women take on much of the housework. As one woman respondent explained, "mothers-in-law even accept and encourage women working, and this has not only become normal, it has become necessary for households that the woman work and earn a salary."

Men to varying degrees have also become more understanding and supportive although there was little evidence in our fieldwork that they are actually doing more housework or childcare, for instance. As one woman shared,

> Yes, I think our society is changing. Since the girls get higher education now, they also get better jobs. I think the relation between me and my husband has changed as well [since undertaking to complete her secondary school studies and then, do a BA degree even though they have five kids]. … I think his attitudes have changed with my developments. My husband helps me now, for example, he will make the coffee when I am studying. He also helped me when I had to go to register in the Ministry of Education after I was married and had children. He went with me to do that. He also encouraged me to run for local elections…. You can look at my daughter, for instance. She is married to a doctor. … He helped her a lot with her studies. Now that she has finished her BA, he wants her to study for her Master's. … When she studied, he helped her with cooking when she had her exams. He even helped her to change the baby's diaper and now he feeds the baby milk…. In our family, there are some changes in what we think is woman's work and what we think is men's work.

To recap some of the main findings related to higher education, tertiary education has expanded rather rapidly over the last decade. Both women and men have benefitted from higher studies although Palestinian women now largely outnumber men and outstrip them in terms of academic performance. That being said, however, the pursuit of higher education is a costly endeavor, and Palestinian women tend to study in the fields of the humanities, the social sciences and education where there are fewer job possibilities upon graduation. The pursuit of higher education by women is also accompanied by some social change within

households and more broadly in Palestinian society ranging from widespread acceptance of women studying and working even after marriage to changes in preferences for future spouses. The next section of this report will examine labor force participation rates for both genders.

Palestinian Labor Force Participation

Palestinian men's and women's formal and informal labor force participation has been the subject of numerous analyses, studies and reports. Given the complicated, multi-faceted nature of this field particularly in such a complex, volatile environment as the WBGS, this modest section will draw on some of this literature to attempt to respond to our working hypothesis of men's 'retreat' and women's 'advancement'. What evidence, if any, is there to suggest that women are 'advancing' into paid employment (whether formal or informal)? And with respect to men, what evidence is there that men have 'retreated' from either formal or informal employment? Or for that matter is there evidence suggesting that men are giving up on looking for work?

To situate Palestinians' labor force participation in the socio-economic and political environment in which it occurs, a brief historic outline of the economic policies is necessary. The Palestinian economy in the West Bank has since the beginning of the 20th century been under various forms of external rule – from the Ottomans, the British, the Jordanians to the Israelis. The development of local economic infrastructure in either agriculture or industry was not promoted, nor prioritized under these different forms of rule (Esim and Kuttab, 2002, 3). While the 1967 occupation allowed Palestinian men workers[5] access to the better-remunerated Israeli wage labor market to work as unskilled and semi-skilled laborers (Farsakh, 2005), Israel's economic policies in the Occupied Territories simultaneously de-developed[6] the Palestinian economy – that is, distorting and undermining the Palestinian development process (Roy, 1999). More recently, the last few decades of occupation, more strictly-enforced closures and escalating violence have led to the destruction of much of the remaining private sector and the Palestinian economy, which is now heavily reliant on foreign aid. The lucrative labor migration opportunities of the seventies and eighties to the Arab Gulf States gradually disappeared, and Israel's closure policies and practices have been reducing access to its labor market[7]. The remaining Palestinian economy has become increasingly fettered, dependent on foreign aid and unable to contribute significantly to job growth while the demographic situation witnesses high numbers of new entrants into the labor force each year.

In this very volatile, unpredictable economic and political environment, employment and unemployment rates have quite understandably witnessed sizable fluctuations over time, and work has become increasingly informalized and precarious. As Esim and Kuttab point out,

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[5] Note Palestinian women workers in the Israeli economy represented less than 2 per cent of the migrant workforce (Farsakh, 2005, 85).

[6] According to Roy, 'de-development' can best be understood when compared to underdevelopment. "Both processes describe a structural relationship between a stronger (dominant) and weaker (subordinate) economy. But while most definitions of underdevelopment allow for structural change and reform within the weaker economy (though that change is often disarticulated because it is oriented to the needs of the dominant economy), de-development not only distorts the development process but undermines it entirely." (Roy, 1999, 64-5).

[7] Sayre and Al-Botmeh (2009) provide a well-documented overview of the demand for Palestinian labor and migration.

> The Israeli occupation has transferred most of the Palestinian employment into informal employment where the formal sector is an unstable sector that keeps slipping back and forth into informal [employment]. ...While it is easy to observe the increase in informalization of employment and growth of the unofficial economy during times of turmoil, it is hard to predict the shifts in the nature and direction of informality for the medium to long term. (Esim and Kuttab, 2002, 27).

In terms of labor market regulations, workers inside Israel who have valid permits are sometimes protected by labor legislation; however, since the issuing of permits has become so restrictive, many workers sneak into Israel and work with the risk of being arrested and of having no workplace protections. In the West Bank, labor regulations which do exist are weakly enforced (including mandated benefits), do not provide universal coverage (as with many private and informal sector workers), and minimum wage rates have not been set (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009, 32-33). There are also a number of shortcomings in the labor law such as the lack of a pension scheme, health insurance provisions, and large segments of the working population are excluded under this legislation (including own-account workers, seasonal workers, contributing family workers, domestic workers, unpaid caregivers (Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 3).

Labor Force Participation Trends (2000-2006)

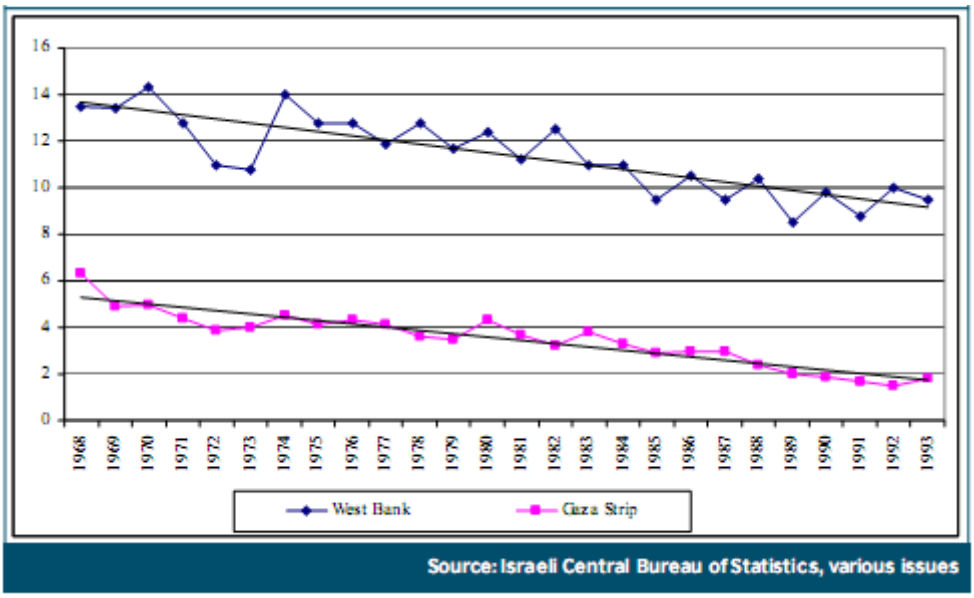
This section will begin with a discussion of the overall labor force participation trends and proceed to examine men's and women's employment (both formal and informal) and unemployment trends, followed by a discussion of these trends in light of the working hypothesis of women's 'advance' and men's 'retreat'. In this section, I will draw mainly on secondary sources and analyses of the Palestinian labor force trends. The various analyses which I draw on are predominantly based on Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' (PCBS) data[8]. In terms of the comparisons of trends over time, much of these analyses use PCBS data from the eve of the second intifada (July - September 2000) and compare it with data from the same quarter in 2006 which represents a less-intense period several years after the start of the second intifada[9].

The 1967 occupation created structural changes,[10] which when combined, resulted in a significant decline in Palestinian women's labor force participation. Palestinian male labor migration into well-remunerated labor markets in Israel and the Arab Gulf States allowed

[8] As PCBS generally uses internationally-accepted definitions in their data collection (such as ILO definitions for labor force participation), I will not define some of these terms as they are in common, international usage.
[9] For a discussion of structural changes in Palestinian society and how labour economists modeled for them, see Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007, p. 31.
[10] These structural changes include: the de-development, distortion and destruction of the Palestinian economy (with particularly devastating consequences for manufacturing and women's employment); border control and imposition of trade tariffs which redirected trade through and with Israel; seizure of land, water and other resources which negatively affected Palestinian agriculture, trade, industry and livelihoods; the opening of the Israeli labor market to Palestinian men workers and largely excluded women workers. For a more in-depth presentation of these historic trends, see Al-Botmeh (2006).

many households to largely sustain themselves on the earnings of a single male breadwinner; this arrangement also frequently reinforced patriarchal structures. In fact, Sayre and Al-Botmeh (2009) point out that young men from the West Bank were more likely than workers from Gaza to be employed in Israel: "Before the Al-Aqsa Intifada, as much as one third of the total employment of young West Bank men took place in Israel, compared to 25 percent of older West Bank men." (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009, 35). By 1995, the rate of Palestinian women's labor participation was in the single digits and one of the lowest in the world. The following figure generated by Al-Botmeh and Sotnik (2007) using various Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics' data from 1968-1993 demonstrates part of this historic decline:

Table 3: Female labour force participation rates in the WBGS: 1968-1993 (%)



Source: Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, various issues cited in Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007, 9.

According to Sayre and Al-Botmeh, young women's labor force participation rates averaged 11 percent during the 11 year period from 1995 to 2006. "These levels are so low partially because these young women are still in school or already starting families. Most female college graduates that do not seek jobs do so in order to focus on their role in the household." (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009, 21).

The outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada in September 2000, the excessive use of force by the Israel Defense Forces and the escalation of hostilities all provoked a severe crisis amongst Palestinians and had a detrimental effect on the economy and labor market trends in the WBGS:

> Between 2000 and 2006, the labour participation rates of the population aged over 15 fell from 43.5 per cent to 41.2 per cent, and by 2006 unemployment was 23.6 per cent. The participation of women was strikingly low, standing at 14.4 per cent compared to an also relatively low 67.6 per cent for men. This needs to be put in the context of high

> unemployment rates, at 20.5 per cent for women and 24.2 per cent for men. (Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 2)

Given that labor participation rates include both employment and unemployment rates, this drop in labor participation signals both an economic slowdown caused by the continuing occupation and the withdrawal of part of the population from the active labor force (ibid, 15). Given the high economic dependency rate of six dependents per wage earner in the WBGS, high unemployment rates affect an even larger segment of the population when an income earner becomes unemployed. Women's labor force participation rates (14.4 per cent) in the WBGS remain very low even when compared with the rates in neighboring countries such as Jordan (23 per cent), Lebanon (29 per cent) and Egypt (30 per cent) (Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007, 13).

Palestinian wage employees constituted 59.3 per cent of the employed population in 2006 (55.0 per cent for women and 60.2 per cent for men). One third of employed women worked as contributing family workers (with little, if any, wages or social benefits), predominantly in agriculture which is a sector in decline. Almost one third (34.1 per cent) of Palestinian women are employed in agriculture, followed by 25.4 per cent in the service sector and 23.3 per cent in the government sector. For men's employment, the sectoral distribution differs considerably: the government sector employs the largest number of employed men (22.6 per cent), followed by trade and commerce which employs 19.4 per cent (Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 16).

Using PCBS statistics between 2000 and 2006, Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab (2008) developed and presented the following table showing the percentage distribution of the population by sex and employment status:

Table 4: Percentage Distribution of Population aged 15 years and above by sex and employment status, 2000-2006

Categories	Q2/2000		Q2/2004		Q2/2006	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Formal employment	6	24	5.8	21	6	24
Employers	0.1	2.8	0.1	2.3	0.1	2.3
Formal self-employed engaged in professional or technical activities	0	0.5	0.1	0.7	0	0.5
Wage employees in the public sector, NGOs, and international agencies	3.5	13	3.7	11	3.9	13
Workers in Israel and colonial settlements with permits/formal ID	0.1	1.8	0	1.6	0.1	2.3
Regular wage employees in the private sector	2.3	6.7	1.9	5.2	1.9	5.4
Informal employment	5.5	40	5.3	24	5.1	27
Informal self-employed and own-account workers	0.5	9.8	0.6	9.9	0.8	11
Contributing family workers	0.4	2.2	0.4	1.7	0.5	1.6
Irregular employees, daily and weekly wage workers in the private sector	0.6	8.9	0.5	4.9	0.4	6
Workers in Israel and colonial settlements without permits	0	13	0.1	2.2	0	2.7
Agricultural workers	4	6.4	3.7	5	3.4	6.2
Non-employment	88.3	34.5	88.9	54.7	88.9	48.3
Unemployed	1.5	5.9	2.4	21.3	2.6	16
Unpaid care workers	61.5	0.5	58.4	0.2	57	0.1
Others outside labour force	25.3	28.1	28.1	33.2	29.3	32.2
Unclassified	0.2	0.8	0	0.4	0	0.4
Table total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: "Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Population aged 15 years and above by sex and employment status, 2000-2006" Calculated from PCBS (2007). Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 19.

Between 2000 and 2006, the proportion of the labor force 15 years old and older engaged in formal employment remained relatively stable at 6 per cent of women and 24 per cent of men (ibid, 18). Al-Botmeh and Sotnik point out that the share of women employed in manufacturing and agriculture decreased significantly in 2001. However, women's formal employment levels were sustained as a result of PA job creation policies in the public sector which were designed to compensate for anticipated job losses inside Israel (Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007, 29-30). "Public sector employment has been a major strategy of the PA to address unemployment", and public sector employment comes with important benefits including job security, written contracts, paid holidays, health insurance, and paid sick leave (ibid, 3). Women have benefitted from new work opportunities for primarily in public health, education and emerging financial sectors. While these policies and programs brought about a brief upturn in women's labor force participation, these rates remained relatively low and declined considerably with the outbreak of the second intifada (Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007, xi). West Bank women were more likely than men to work in the public sector, and in 2006, nearly half of women wage laborers worked in the public sector (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009, 37).

The steep fall in the share of men in informal employment from 40 per cent in 2000 to 27 per cent in 2006 has had particularly grave consequences. Strict Israeli closures and mobility restrictions imposed on Palestinians resulted in a substantial decrease in the number of men working in Israel without permits dropping from 13 per cent in 2000 to only 2.7 per cent in 2006, while the number of unemployed men rose from 5.9 per cent to 16 per cent (Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 18). Part of the male worker population also withdrew from the labor force, and the share of economically-inactive men rose from 28.6 per cent to 32.3 per cent in 2006 (ibid 20).

While men's share of informal employment dropped, Palestinian women's informal employment remained relatively constant at just under 6 per cent during the same period 2000-2006. The number of women working in agriculture dropped from 34.1 per cent in 2000 to 33.4 per cent in 2006, even though the percentage of men working in agriculture increased from 9.7 per cent in 2000 to 11.1 per cent in 2006 (ibid, p. 20).

In terms of the relationship between women's labor force participation and their role as primary care providers, the lack of affordable, quality care facilities and services lead many women to drop out of work after having children and staying away until their children reach school age. In 2006, the percentage of women classified as being outside the labor force was 85.6 per cent, where 66.1 per cent were classified as dedicating themselves exclusively to family and household responsibilities (compared to 32.1 per cent of men being outside the labor force and only 0.6 per cent dedicating themselves exclusively to family and household responsibilities) (Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 23). However, other PCBS data suggests that the number of Palestinian women actively engaged in unpaid care work has decreased from 61.5 per cent in 2000 to 57.0 per cent in 2006 (ibid, 18). Nonetheless, the majority of Palestinian women is actively engaged in unpaid care work, and these statistics also highlight "the importance of gender when discussing unpaid care work as being part of the unprotected labour force." (ibid).

Discussion: Women's Advance and Men's Retreat in the Labor Force?

Clearly, the Palestinian economy has been in a state of decline since 2000 with detrimental effects on the Palestinian labor force dependent upon it. The combined effects of this economic decline and the restrictions on Palestinians' access to the Israeli labor market have affected Palestinian workers and their dependents quite adversely. While formal employment has remained stable for both men (24 per cent) and women (6 per cent), there has been a slight, constant decline in informal employment (Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 2) with men's informal employment rates dropping substantially. Men's wages in the informal sector have also dropped narrowing the gender wage gap in the informal sector. "After the eruption of the second intifada in September 2000, the Palestinian labour market faced an increasingly severe crisis. By the end of 2006, a third of the Palestinian labour force had no hope of finding employment in the near future to secure a minimum level of income." (ibid, 14).

While unemployment rates have fluctuated over time, current rates are higher than the pre-2000 levels: "It registered 18.2% in 1995, then, it increased to reach its highest level 31.3% in 2002, while it reached 26.3% in 2008" (Khawaja and Omari, 2009, 1). Men with low educational credentials and educated women experienced the highest rates of unemployment at 13.6 per cent and 32.1 per cent respectively (PCBS, 2007, 78). There are also reports and some evidence of increasing numbers of discouraged men and women workers. As stated earlier, the share of economically-inactive men rose from 28.6 per cent in 2000 to 32.3 per cent in 2006 (Hilal et al, 2008, 20). During our fieldwork in both 2008 and 2009, we witnessed despair, hopelessness and depression amongst many young men in rural communities who were without regular employment. Historically, we know from Fafo's 1993 Living Conditions Survey that the share of the Palestinian labor force employed in Israel was higher in the rural areas and that young West Bank men constituted the largest group (30 per cent) of Palestinian labor (Heiberg and Øvensen, 1994, 201-2). So, we can surmise that the loss of better-remunerated employment inside the Israeli labor market has very likely had a considerable affect up on these social groups. The reality of lost employment in Israel, combined with the insufficient number of decent jobs available in the West Bank, provide important insight into the despair and hopelessness of young unemployed West Bank men and particularly in rural areas. When examining this phenomenon through such a lens, these findings become less surprising. As one young man who sneaks into Israel to work without a permit expressed his situation, "with such risk in work, we cannot build our future and get married." With such high risk in finding and getting to decently-remunerated work inside Israel, young men such as him experience great difficulty in amassing the necessary resources to marry and start their own families – that is, amassing the 'nest egg' that will enable them to build their own accommodations, marry and start a family.

In this volatile and vulnerable environment of economic decline and political uncertainty, few men or women appear to be making significant advances in the Palestinian or Israeli labor markets although both genders have been making important investments in education and specifically in higher education. Men's position in the labor force has definitely suffered in terms of the loss of informal employment particularly in Israel but also in terms of a drop in informal wage levels. Such losses might be more palatable were the dependency ratios – that is, the number of people dependent on the wage earner to also drop; however, that has not been the case. While there has been considerable erosion of male breadwinning work, there has not been an accompanying, considerable increase in the opportunities for women in the labor force to offset this imbalance. Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab's (2008) work has highlighted the worrying phenomenon of the increasing informalization of work and the increasing numbers of working poor.

Women in many cases have stepped in to try and augment household income with additional wages and/or other economic contributions (Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007, 42-3; UNESCO, 2004). Women household members have used a variety of household coping strategies to lower household consumption as much as possible (Mitchell, 2009). Many young women pursue higher education in the hopes of eventually securing a public sector job. While many women are successful and manage full-time work and family life albeit with caring support

from extended family, many women graduate and encounter a highly-gender-segregated labor market. The Palestinian labor market is highly-gender segregated both vertically and horizontally allowing women access to only a very limited number of sectors and professions generally in non-growth areas of the economy (Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 2; Al-Botmeh and Sotnik, 2007, 34). For those without higher education, many will work on family land or be engaged in some form of income-generating projects at home as 'contributing family members'. However, given the small manufacturing sector which might otherwise employ more women, there are few opportunities for women between these two areas, agriculture and public sector employment.

Clearly, support to the public sector remains an important and continued priority, along with private sector development, job creation, trade promotion, and so on. However, trade and mobility restrictions and other economic fetters need to be removed if the Palestinian economy is to be allowed and encouraged to grow, as well as absorb some of the new labor market entrants. Men and women with post-secondary education have benefitted from public sector employment and continue to seek out these opportunities. However, the public sector cannot reasonably absorb all of the new graduates, nor can the local private sector in its current fettered state. Self-employment[11] may offer some opportunities for new labor market entrants and university graduates provided start-up grants or loans are also offered. That being said, a recent survey of micro-enterprises showed that most were static and experienced little or no real growth over the past decade (Massar Associates Study cited in Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 12). The integration of women and youth of both genders into the labor force in a volatile and vulnerable Palestinian economy will be no simple feat, nor will it likely be high on the political agenda given the myriad other major problems like the continuing Israeli colonization, problems of national reconciliation, growing Palestinian poverty, a faltering, fetter Palestinian economy and a weak Palestinian Authority. Nonetheless, job creation programs which assist male and female youth, and women in integrating into the labor force are important, as are the development of quality, affordable daycare services and facilities which can both free or lessen women's unpaid care burden and create additional paid employment.

[11] There is already evidence that a considerable share of university graduates are engaged in informal activities (Hilal, Al Kafri and Kuttab, 2008, 12).

Changing Marriage Practices and the Transition to Marriage and Family Life

> The age when men and women form marital unions is influenced by social norms and expectations regarding their roles as spouse and parent - factors that are plausibly changing with globalization, urbanization, and rising educational attainment; as such, the timing of marriage should be of considerable relevance to researchers interested in the transition to adulthood in the developing world. If, for example, men are now postponing marriage because of greater expectations about job status and employment stability and the material possessions needed to form a household, and women are delaying marriage because of shifting gender roles, it is important to document these patterns of behavior and understand what the potential implications are both for the individuals and for the larger society. (Mensch, Singh and Casterline, 2005, 118-119)

Throughout the Arab World, youth are pursuing higher education at record levels, and the demographic youth bulge means large numbers of young people enter the labor market each year, including large numbers of young women who are more likely than ever to work outside the home. New patterns of marriage and family formation are emerging - challenging women's traditional roles at home and in society (Rashad, Osman and Roudi-Fahimi, 2005, 1). As men and women's roles in society and in the home are interdependent, changes in the roles of one gender will affect the other albeit to varying degrees. Marriage as a social institution has also been changing in Palestinian society as documented by the important, insightful work of Palestine gender scholars. In Palestinian society and in Arab culture more generally, marriage is a well-defined turning point, bestowing prestige, recognition and social approval on both partners and marking the transition into adulthood for youth (Singerman and Ibrahim, 2003; Rashad, Osman and Roudi-Fahimi, 2005; Singerman, 2007; Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009).

While wedding celebrations and marriage practices are linked to each other, weddings are about performing identity or Palestinianness[12], while marriages are "crucial moments in the (re)production of families and the nation." (Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors, 2009, 14). As Johnson, Abu Nahleh and Moor's 2009 article on weddings and war suggests, today's marriage arrangements and wedding celebrations are conducted rather differently from those of the first intifada – characterized by modest, even austere celebrations - to those of the second intifada involving prominent displays of consumption. The austerity and silences of first-intifada weddings stemmed from cross-class solidarity with the families of martyrs, political prisoners and victims of Israeli violence on the one hand, and from prohibitions on lavish consumption and loud celebrations on the other (ibid, 22). During the first intifada, an ideal groom was involved in the nationalist struggle – only to be replaced during the second intifada, by men who could meet their financial obligations and offer a stable, family life (ibid, 20). Weddings during the second intifada reflected the "sharp economic inequalities

[12] Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors point out that wedding celebrations can provide a window through which to examine lived politics through the symbolic, material and social arrangements of marriage (Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors, 2009, 31).

and new economies of privilege and patronage" which abounded in the post-Oslo process period (ibid, 14-15).

Jad's 2009 study on the politics of group weddings offers important insights into the evolving practices of group weddings generally, and of Islamic group weddings in particular. Rather than emerging from fixed religious meanings embedded in scripture or the traditions (*ahadith)*, Islamic group weddings are hybrid social constructions which draw on a "mixture of new secular 'traditions' and newly-invented 'religious' rituals, along with borrowings of globalized customs" (Jad, 2009, 36). Group weddings are also sites of political contestation and tension between the two major political movements, Hamas and Fateh, "as they compete over which rituals and symbols should be dominant: new Islamic or fading nationalist" (ibid, 36-37). While group weddings reflect the creativity of Palestinians resisting Israeli closure and continued colonization, Islamic group weddings have a clear political purpose: "Hamas in particular sponsors group weddings in order to promote its political and social ideology, increase its constituencies, and root itself among the people in general and youth in particular. Group and/or Islamic weddings are a potentially important instrument to Islamize Palestinian society and culture" (ibid , 37).

While marriage as practiced during the first intifada often transgressed conventional class and religious boundaries (Johnson, Abu Nahleh and Moors, 2009, 11), Muhanna's recent research on gender and agency in the Gaza Strip suggests that marriage has become a project for livelihood survival unsettling patriarchal and generational hierarchies within families. "Older men and women are being replaced by young men and women in family provision and in decision making within the family and in the wider community institutions, and marriage has become a project for livelihood survival, rather than a symbol of the persistence of patriarchy" (Muhanna, 2010, 234). In selecting a spouse, similar trends are at work regarding marriage in the West Bank: while one's family is still involved in the choice of spouse, young people, with little exception, prefer a spouse with higher education and secure employment. There is also some evidence that men may prefer to marry a woman five or six years their junior (Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors, 2009, 13). While the difference in the average age at first marriage between genders is approximately five years[13], this age difference requires further study to determine whether this phenomenon reflects a preference on the part of men to marry a younger woman, or whether this age difference comes as a result of the time most men require to accumulate the resources necessary and prepare to marry.

Singerman and Ibrahim's (2003) research on the cost of marriage in Egypt and in the region demonstrates that as youth throughout the Arab World are faced with high youth unemployment and longer school-to-work-to-marriage transitions, many rely on one of the few remaining coping strategies – that of delaying marriage until they have managed to garner the necessary resources. Singerman has coined the term 'wait adulthood' or 'waithood' to refer to youth enduring "prolonged adolescence and remaining single for long periods of

[13] PCBS statistics on the age at first marriage by gender between 1997 and 2008 for the West Bank show a consistent difference in this age with men generally marrying when they are five years older than their women cohorts.

time while trying to save money to marry" (Singerman, 2007, 6). The notion refers not only to the consequences of delayed marriage and to the mixed feelings about an extended period of parental dependence, but also suggests 'waiting' to negotiate one's identity within the broader nationalist, political, religious, development and neo-liberal discourses which shape the constructions of desirable youth.

Delaying marriage is problematic for individuals in Arabic society for two important reasons: the transition out of the youth phase and into adulthood (and citizenship) occurs when one marries; and secondly because sexuality has been linked to marriage in Arab societies (Singerman, 2007, 5). For practicing Palestinian Muslims, marriage is also a duty in Islam, and given that men and their families formally initiate the betrothal process, men carry a particular responsibility to get married and start a family.[14] This section will examine what's involved in making the transition to marriage, the human and financial costs of this transition, and the trends in the age at first marriage in the West Bank.

Navigating and Preparing the Transition into Marriage

In much of the Arab World, the cost of marriage constitutes an important barrier to youth making the transition into marriage in the region. In the West Bank, the challenge of finding decently-remunerated work mentioned earlier, combined with the cost of marriage, poses serious difficulties for many young men trying to make the transition to marriage.

Before a man can ask for a woman's hand in marriage, however, there are two important pre-requisites related to employment and housing which West Bank men must secure. The prospective suitor must have a job or regular income, which constitutes a major source of pressure for young men, particularly in the complex political and economic environment described earlier (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009, 39). Families that are able to, help with the betrothal-related costs but the man needs to secure a stable income. As one father explained, "the responsibility for getting enough money to get married is shared with the parents, but the boy has to find a job and start to save some money, and if he cannot make it, it is my duty as a father to help him if he can't save enough by himself."

In terms of the housing pre-condition, while this requirement has sometimes been waived as during the first intifada and as currently in parts of the Gaza Strip, men respondents in the rural West Bank reported that no father will accept to give his daughter away in marriage unless the couple has a separate accommodation for themselves. Bride's families have, however, been known to agree to their daughter's engagement while the suitor finishes building the accommodation provided the housing is completed before the celebration. Nonetheless, to get married, West Bank men must also build or secure housing.

[14] While it may not be easy, It is socially more acceptable for women to remain unmarried (i.e., to take care of elderly parents). National statistics also attest to the growing numbers of educated women (7% in the West Bank ages 35 to 39) who remain single well into their thirties (Jarallah, 2008, 4).

We did find some small regional differences between northern and southern West Bank betrothal practices. In the northern towns and villages, we found that the engagement party has been pared down considerably from a party akin to a small wedding reception to a simple dinner for some dozen close family members. In the southern West Bank area of Hebron, we found that while sizable engagement parties continue, there was some evidence of postponed dower practices (including the use of two contracts) and attempts to establish what is required by Islamic tradition during betrothal (as opposed to what people want and desire during celebrations). A point to which I will return later in this paper on efforts to bring the cost of marriage down.

While Palestinian social norms require young men to work and save money to cover some of the costs of getting married, the groom's family generally helps to offset some of these expenses insofar as they are able. However, households' ability to help their children has diminished considerably since 2000 as the majority of West Bank households are now located below the poverty line (56 per cent in 2007 as per UNDP, 2007). As indicated earlier, the economic situation in the West Bank remains dismal and fettered under Israel's closure regime and colonial project. In cash-strapped environments, Hoodfar points out that it becomes very hard for low-income households to save money since so many people are in constant need for cash ranging from neighbors to more distant ones (Hoodfar, 1996, 14).

In terms of the resources which a man and/or his household needs to mobilize, a simple wedding in a West Bank town or village cost approximately 7,000 Jordanian Dinars (JD) (or $9,800 USD) in late 2009, plus the cost of the prompt dower (3,000 JD or $4,200USD) and between 200g and 300g of gold. A fancier, higher-end wedding would run between 10,000 and 12,000JD (or $14,000USD and $16,800USD), plus the gold and the dower. Depending on a man's salary and the degree to which he must assist and support his parents and household, these large sums of money can take anywhere from a few to several years for a young man and his household to earn and save. Jad's (2009) research on group weddings in the Palestinian Territories indicates that a groom's expenses can be reduced by almost half – making group weddings an attractive alternative for some.

For many young men, they must also be prepared to cover the costs of their new wife's higher education after getting married. As stated earlier, many women are engaged and marry while they are in the midst of their university education. In the negotiation process, a bride's family generally insists that a condition of the marriage is that she be allowed and supported to continue her university studies and graduate. In these cases, grooms and their families must also be able to take on the cost of putting her through university. While this phenomenon doesn't drive up the betrothal costs per se, these costs do constitute additional financial burden on the groom and his family. A recently-married van driver in his mid-20s complains of having to pay high university tuition fees for his wife "We prevent ourselves from [spending] on many things to ensure the payment [of tuition fees]."

While there have been some claims about the cost of marriage increasing in the region, Johnson et al (2009) state that the frequent perception in the region – that there has been a

marked increase in marriage expenditures (which also vary according to class, geographic location and kinship) – is not always reflected in country data although there may be a longer-term trend since the 1970s (Johnson et al., 2009). They do conclude however that:

> … what is clear is that, whether rising or not, the high cost of marriage as a proportion of household resources (Singerman and Ibrahim 2003; Singerman 2007) has made marriage more difficult for young men and a burden for families; young men in Palestine may well see delayed marriage, rather than early marriage, as a major problem" (Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors, 2009, 26-27).

One West Bank father in a small town shared that he tries to help his son (a recently-released former-detainee in his early twenties) as much as he can with earning and saving money to marry and to start a family. However, he himself cannot predict when he will have waged employment himself. This father, in his late forties, used to work in construction in Israel. When he gets construction work, he tries to involve his son in the work. However, the availability of paid work has become so unpredictable, as has its frequency.

Gradual Increase in the Average Age at First Marriage

The concern with high fertility rates (and the links between early marriage, fertility and demography) has led predominantly to a focus on women's age at first marriage in the Middle East. This focus has come to some degree at the expense of examining trends in the average age at first marriage amongst young men. However, Diane Singerman's insightful work on the rising average age at first marriage amongst men, delayed marriage and the high cost of marriage in Egypt and in the region (2007; 2003 with Ibrahim; 1996 with Hoodfar) has shed light on this important phenomenon, as well as identifying research priorities and policy questions.

While the age at first marriage has generally increased in the region (Singerman, 2007, 5), in the Palestinian Territories, Sayre and Al-Botmeh find that the average age at first marriage has risen recently (from 18.9 for women and 24.1 for men in 2000 to 19.4 and 24.7 respectively in 2005) but not as rapidly in other Middle Eastern countries (Sayre and Al-Botmeh, 2009, 39). While their study is an important and well-founded analysis and contribution, I found that by broadening the time period considered to 1997 and 2008, that the rising average age at first marriage trend becomes more apparent.

Table 5: Average Age at First Marriage, by year, gender and governorate (for 1997, 2000, 2005 and 2008)

	2008		2005		2000		1997	
	Females	**Males**	**Females**	**Males**	**Females**	**Males**	**Females**	**Males**
Palestinian Territory Averages	**19.5**	**24.8**	**19.4**	**24.7**	**18.9**	**24.1**	**18**	**23**
West Bank Averages	**19.8**	**25.4**	**19.6**	**25.2**	**19**	**24.5**	**18**	**23**
Jenin	20.0	26.1	19.6	25.2	19	24.5	18	23
Tubas	20.9	26.2	20.5	26.2	20.2	25.3	18	24
Tulkarem	20.5	26.6	20.4	26.4	19.8	25.4	19	25
Qalqilya	19.8	25.7	19.5	26.0	18.9	24.7	18	23
Salfit	20.0	25.2	19.9	25.4	19	24.3	18	23
Nablus	20.3	26.2	19.8	26	19.1	25.5	18	24
Ramallah and Al-Beireh	20.1	25.3	19.8	25	19.2	24.6	18	23
Jerusalem	19.2	25.0	18.9	24.8	18.7	24.3	18	23
Jericho and Alaghwar	20.1	25.1	21.1	25.2	19.8	24.6	20	24
Bethlehem	21.3	26.2	20.3	25.9	19.4	25	18	23
Hebron	19.4	24.4	19.2	24.2	18.8	23.3	18	22

Source: Upon request from PCBS.

The overall rise in the average age at first marriage in the WBGS between 1997 and 2008 was 1.5 years for women and 1.8 years for men. In the Gaza Strip, the average age at first marriage rose by one year for both genders: from 23 years for men to 24, and from 18 years to 19 for women. In the West Bank averages, however, the rise is more notable with women's average age rising by 1.8 years (from 18 to 19.8 years) and men's average age rising by 2.4 years (from 23 to 25.4 years).

Also striking in the above data are the differences in the average age at first marriage in the different districts of the West Bank, such as Bethlehem, Tulkarem and Jenin. The differences in the average age at first marriage between districts, for instance, are interesting. In Tulkarem, the average age at first marriage for men was already 20 years old in 1997 -- two years higher than the West Bank average, and Tulkarem's women's average was 19 years -- one year higher than the West Bank women's average. In the Bethlehem district, the rise in the average age at first marriage for men rose from 23 in 1997 to 26.2 in 2008 – a rise of 3.2 years, while men's average age at first marriage in Jenin rose by 3.1 years (from 23 to 26.1 years). For women in the Bethlehem district this rise went from an average age of 18 in 1997 to 21.3 in 2008 signifying a rise of 3.3 years, while a rise of 2.9 years amongst women occurred in Tubas.

These rising averages clearly demonstrate a later transition to marriage occurring with regional differences. However, this data does not tell us which reasons are behind this later

transition. We do know, however, that youth are spending more time in institutions of higher study which as Sayre and Al-Botmeh have suggested is likely to lead to some increase in the age at first marriage (2009, 39). However, pursuing higher education is not the only pursuit which is time consuming for young Palestinian adults. We also know from our interviews in the south, central and northern West Bank in particular in rural areas that many young men are finding it harder to find decently-remunerated, regular work (as reflected in higher rates of unemployment and partly by some of those leaving the labor force) and save to get married. As one West Bank mother clearly exclaimed,

> My son just failed his *tawjihi* (final high school exams) and is trying to find a job to build his future. … but if he wants a family, he has to build a house and have a stable income. This was much easier before, because then everybody could go to Israel and save up some money for their marriage. But this has become difficult now. The wall is the problem for us now. Before we could go to Israel illegally, but we can't do that anymore. So, 'the situation for the boys has become very difficult.

Before the strict closures and the wall, young men particularly in rural areas who couldn't find a job locally used to be able to travel into Israel to work in construction, the service sector or agriculture but the closure regime has made the economic situation very difficult. Commuting to urban centers to work in the Palestinian labor market is not always feasible given the relatively high costs of transportation and low wages, not to mention the mobility challenges (resulting from the ad hoc establishment of checkpoints and road closures). Palestinian employers sometimes openly state their unwillingness to hire workers who live in another community (and particularly from communities where there are strict closures) out of a fear that such workers will be late or sometimes unable to show up because of Israeli closure practices.

In terms of the loss of better-remunerated employment inside the Israeli labor market, we also know from Fafo's 1993 Living Conditions Survey that the share of the Palestinian labor force employed in Israel was higher in the rural areas and that young West Bank men constituted the largest group (30 per cent) of Palestinian labor (Heiberg and Øvensen, 1994, 201-2). "Investigation of Palestinian employment in Israel reveals that particularly individuals in Gaza, persons from poor households, and citizens of West Bank villages tend to work there." (ibid, 213). Deprived groups of landless, poor and rural Palestinian men who had few other employment opportunities used to be able to find work there (ibid, 202). Hence, the despair we have experienced in our interviews with a number of young West Bank men in rural communities also becomes more understandable in terms of these historic structural changes.

In terms of some of the despair we observed amongst young men in small towns and rural areas, one single 28-year-old man, Mahmood, shared with us that he has been unemployed for four years since he graduated from university with a degree in law. Further probing into how he had spent those four years revealed that he had in fact been articling with a lawyer for about a year after graduating. After completing his articling requirement, he then had to

pay 500 JD (approximately $700USD) to be accepted into the Palestinian Bar Association so that he could in fact practice law. To raise these funds and make a little money to cover some of his living expenses, he worked without a permit inside Israel for a year and a half (sometimes managing to sneak in, sometimes not). He told us that there is no work for a lawyer in his small rural community but has looked for work in larger nearby towns. When he first started looking for a job, he said he visited many organizations and left his *curriculum vitae* with many potential employers. Some friends suggested that he volunteer a few days of week to try to eventually be employed. Mahmood volunteered for a few months, before deciding he could no longer afford the cost of daily commuting and lunch. He also felt that people seem to be employed through their connections. In terms of his job search strategy, he relies mainly on his social network of friends, relatives and acquaintances and maintains these relations with the hope that they might help him find something. Mahmood appeared understandably withdrawn and depressed. Some of his responses suggested that he had internalized his unemployment status, rather than understanding it as an external, structural problem faced by many youth all over the West Bank. When I asked him about his plans to get married and start a family, he responded: "I can't even think about getting married in my situation! How can I? If it were only Mahmood, who cares? Mahmood can die. You can kill Mahmood. But it's not just me; there are many more men like me in this situation."

When we arrived to interview Mahmood around 1pm, he had only just woken up. We learned later from his father that Mahmood and his friends stay up late most nights until 3 or 4am either at home or outside on the street. By day, they sleep through the morning waking up at noon or in the early afternoon and are often out of the public eye – coming out in the evening. Whether this daily rhythm is based on a conscious strategy or not, I argue that these practices allow young men to become in a sense 'invisible' within their own communities – thereby avoiding the gaze, comments and questions which are forms of social regulation often endured by youth from older people. These forms of social regulation reflect ambivalence in communities which have yet to fully come to terms with the endemic erosion and loss of male breadwinning work in the WBGS. On the one hand, Palestinians know that it has become extremely difficult to get into Israel to work and that it is very risky to do so illegally. On the other hand, while there appears to have been an easing of the expectations of young men to secure breadwinning work, discursively these expectations still arise through comments, admonishments and questions like: 'when are you getting married?' Such questions, when frequently posed in public to a young man who has been unemployed for a few years, can be experienced as invasive but also frustrating because such questions fail to appreciate the youth's difficult living situation in an increasingly-impoverished society.

Other rural households in the southern West Bank, for instance, told us that "there's no wedding without a loan" and then, one small business owner said that 'it's loan after loan' which households depend on. Some women confided that they had secured a micro-credit loan by saying they wanted to raise livestock for business purposes but had in fact used the loan to offset the cost of wedding expenditures. While this sort of use of micro-credit goes against micro-credit doctrine which declares that loans should only be used for income-

generating development purposes, weddings and marriages are important social events for families and households, as well as being costly events.

On a broader, societal level, Palestinians also organize in different ways to keep the lid on the high cost of marriage. As mentioned earlier, group weddings, offered by both Fatah and Hamas, are not an entirely-new phenomenon although they are now more frequently practiced. They provide an alternative to costly wedding traditions – reducing the groom's expenses by almost half – but encourage gender segregation in much of the celebrations (Jad, 2009).

In some other communities, particularly in the southern West Bank, there have been intriguing local efforts to draft agreements to establish and cap the expenses on wedding celebrations - perhaps the most notable example being the *Watheeqat al-afaf* (which has been translated as both 'Chastity Agreement' and 'Decency Agreement') in the town of Beni Naim in southern Hebron area. Concerns that the high cost of marriage in Beni Naim was leading local men to marry women in other communities and leaving local women single, led to an initiative between the four main clans to establish what is required vis-à-vis religious obligations in the betrothal process and then, to set a ceiling on these different expenses. Over the course of some ten meetings, this agreement was hammered out with the iterative involvement of religious authorities (to ensure that religious obligations are duly integrated), followed by a public celebration and the distribution of flyers with the full-text version of the agreement, as well as posters all over the town. We also heard reports that this agreement had been used in a neighboring village and in parts of the city of Hebron. Reportedly, similar initiatives were underway in Dheisheh Refugee Camp through one of the mosques; Johnson et al. also make reference to such agreements in Dheisheh Camp (Johnson, Abu Nahleh and Moors, 2009, 33).

Concluding Remarks

This report has presented and reviewed some of the key trends for both genders in terms of higher educational attainment, labor force participation and the transition to marriage and family life drawing on qualitative interviews, statistical data and academic literature from the region. A simplistic hypothesis of female advancement/male retreat was frequently used rhetorically to illustrate both how each gender is differentially affected by broader structural changes and how gender roles and expectations may predispose certain individuals and social groups to certain kinds of vulnerability in a socio-economic and political environment of continued colonization, closure and conflict. This simplistic rhetorical hypothesis-cum-gender-scorecard is in no way meant to suggest a 'girls-against-the-boys' approach (or vice versa) to gender relations and changes. Most women want their husbands, sons and brothers to do well and thrive and vice versa. Women who have managed to secure decent employment cannot fully enjoy such achievements if their male kin suffer from long-term unemployment, underemployment and/or feelings of depression, despair and worthlessness. The 1967 Israeli Occupation of the WBGS created a transformation of the rural Palestinian labor force from peasants into wage-laborers in the Israeli labor market (Heiberg and Øvensen, 1994, 201), and these wage laborers were with little exception, men. As already stated, the higher remuneration, which the Israeli labor market offered unskilled and semi-skilled workers, led to a higher standard of living and a reinforcement of male breadwinning work, while simultaneously undermining the Palestinian economy. Lucrative male wage labor opportunities inside Israel (and the Gulf States) reinforced male breadwinning work, while women's employment in the manufacturing sector (hard hit by the 1967 occupation), was detrimentally affected by its decline. With the gradual implementation of the closure regime since the 1990s, the male rural labor force, which had been transformed into wage laborers in Israel, has found it next to impossible to access that labor market. Consequently, male breadwinning work has been both eroded and opportunities lost as a result of the strict closure regime and the fettered Palestinian economy.

While both genders have made significant investments in higher education, Palestinian women are outnumbering and outstripping Palestinian men academically. That being said, women pursuing higher education are often encouraged and guided into academic fields and specializations where there are few job opportunities awaiting them upon graduation or in non-growth areas of the economy - further evidence of this being that highly-educated women are the largest group of unemployed women. The investments by young Palestinian men, women and their families do not, however, guarantee or result in decently-paid work upon graduation. Nonetheless, both genders have scored very well and advanced in the area of higher education – particularly when one considers the difficult economic climate and escalated levels of hostilities since 2000.

In terms of labor force participation, however, neither gender has been able to advance appreciably (although women's participation is much more widely accepted than before the first intifada). In fact, in light of the state of decline and compression of the Palestinian

economy, the fact that both genders' formal employment has remained at about the same level since 2000 is in some respects an achievement. While the gender wage gap has narrowed in informal employment, this trend did not occur because women's informal wages went up but due to men's informal wages dropping (with the loss of work inside Israel). While men employed informally inside Israel were particularly hard hit by both loss of employment and falling wages, neither gender has 'gained' *per se*.

Regarding unemployment rates, the patterns differ considerably by gender, with the largest group of unemployed men (13.6 percent) being those with low formal education attainment levels and the largest group of unemployed women (31.3 percent) - being those who are highly-educated (with 13 or more years of schooling). Despite their 13 or more years of education, highly-educated women experience rates of unemployment which are more than double those of the largest group of unemployed men who have only basic education. Current unemployment levels are higher than before 2000. There is evidence of both men and women withdrawing from the labor force although the statistics cannot reveal the reasons for this withdrawal. While young women often withdraw for a period of time to raise small children, men's withdrawal from the labor force is more difficult to make sense of. Given the very difficult employment situation, and while it is impossible to know for certain, it is likely that a proportion of these men and women have withdrawn because they have given up on finding employment. The share of economically-inactive men has increased from 28.6 percent in 2000 to 32.3 percent in 2006 and can be partly interpreted as a sign of withdrawal and retreat.

Comparatively speaking, Palestinian women's labor force participation has in many respects until recently been gradually undermined, if not openly discouraged, since the 1967 occupation. While the expectation that Palestinian men secure male breadwinning work in Israel appears to have eased somewhat as closure has tightened its grip on the people and economy, on a social and discursive level, the male breadwinner norm has yet to completely disappear, nor have some of the material expectations on young men to find work, save a nest egg, build housing, get married and frequently, support their brides in finishing their university studies. So, while many Palestinians understand the economic challenges facing men, traditions and customs still require men to build up a nest egg and provide financially for their families. Social expectations also appear to have eased somewhat but remain a source of pressure for men generally and young men in particular.

Many of the men we interviewed had to varying degrees internalized feelings of failure in terms of their ability to provide for their families and/or find work (for the unemployed but also for some of the employed), as opposed to understanding their experiences as being a result of structural unemployment, underemployment and continued colonization. A point to which I will return below.

In terms of the transition to marriage and family life, this report has argued that there has been a notable increase in the average age at first marriage for Palestinians in the West Bank

and particularly for men. By examining these average ages at first marriage over roughly a decade (1997-2008) and by examining different average ages in different districts of the West Bank, these differences emerge more clearly: men's average age at first marriage in the WB increased by 2.4 years from 23.0 to 25.4 years, while women's average age increased by 1.8 years from 18 to 19.8 years. However, an examination of the average age at first marriage at the West Bank district-level reveals considerable differences in some of the rural areas. First of all, in 1997, there were already noticeable differences in men's average age at first marriage between districts; while the West Bank average age for men was 23.0 years, in Jenin, Tubas, Nablus, and Jericho, the average age at first marriage for men was already one year higher, and in Tulkarem, this figure was already two years higher. In Bethlehem and Qalqilya, the increase in the average age at first marriage for men was well above the West Bank average of 2.4 years, namely 3.3 years (from 23.0 to 26.3 years) and 2.7 years (from 23.0 to 25.7 years) respectively. While this discussion is more suggestive than exhaustive, the purpose of presenting these figures is simply to underline this trend and suggest that this increase cannot solely be attributed to young men spending longer time in higher education – as our interviews in rural areas of the West Bank indicate.

While an increase in the average age at first marriage may have some positive dimensions (i.e. high levels of education, lower fertility rates, and so on), our interviews with West Bank men in rural areas suggest that the delayed marriage trends which Singerman (2007) has identified in the region are also at work in parts of West Bank society. While it is unclear whether the cost of marriage has in fact increased significantly over the past several years, the cost of marriage nonetheless constitutes a sizable sum for young men and their families to amass particularly under the dire economic circumstances already described (Johnson, Abu Nahleh and Moors, 2007).

As this report has shown, it's not just the cost of marriage which Palestinian men and their families need to mobilize before making a marriage proposal, but also housing. After the wedding celebration, as the higher education section of this report also demonstrated, many newly-wed grooms (and their families) must also assume the costs of the new bride's continued pursuit of higher study. To again cite Johnson, Abu Nahleh, and Moors (2009), the sizable proportion which the cost of marriage represents vis-à-vis household resources "has made marriage more difficult for young men and a burden for families; young men in Palestine may well see delayed marriage, rather than early marriage, as a major problem" (26-27). To mobilize and attempt to save such sums of money in a cash-strapped environment, households and lower-income households in particular frequently prioritize such social obligations and investments as the cost of marriage over others which may be equally or even more import (such as postponing medical treatment or surgery).

This report also identified a disjuncture or ambivalence within West Bank society vis-à-vis the loss and erosion of male breadwinning work and the related societal attitudes, expectations and roles. On the one hand, our interviews revealed that people are aware and realize that men's ability to secure decently-remunerated work and provide for their families

has been seriously jeopardized by the closure, and many understand that young men in particular suffer from the closure-related loss of work. On the other hand, however, gender roles and expectations are slower in adjusting to the realities of economic decline, and when articulated, they highlight the tenacity of a presumed male breadwinner model. As one woman whose husband has been unemployed for a few years in a household with several children told us, "Working outside the home is not my duty." Many younger women (although not exclusively) have adopted strategies of pursuing higher education in an effort to find public sector jobs upon graduation and to augment household income. Interestingly, women who work outside the home often refer to 'helping their husbands' with making money and generating income which implies that the ultimate responsibility for providing for the household remains with men. Similarly, when women describe their husbands' housework, they also refer to the husband 'helping' them – again highlighting the assumed gendered responsibility for domestic work. As another woman who has been married for over 15 years stated and worked in half a dozen jobs, "I have worked in different places [over the past decade] to try to help my husband." While such assumptions and references to men 'helping' women at home are not exclusive to Palestinian society and despite a wide spectrum of attitudes across class, generation and gender, there remains an underlying tenacious belief that men ultimately bear the responsibility for providing for their households financially.

Based on our interviews with men of varying ages in the rural West Bank, many men had internalized their inability to earn enough money to either start a family or provide for one (rather than understanding the structural nature of their economic predicament) although the decision to postpone this transition also highlights the agency of these men (who put this desire on hold). I would argue that under the current conditions, holding men ultimately responsible for household provision not only erases Palestinian women's both historic and current-day contributions (Tucker, 1985), but isolates men and individualizes this responsibility which is in reality shared with other members as well - be it through cash, labor or non-cash contributions. On an individual level, many of the men we interviewed internalized their inability to provide adequately for their households as personal failure – leaving them feeling frustrated, desperate and angry. This process of internalization depoliticizes the structural effects of decades of colonization and colonial practices on the Palestinian economy and livelihoods which Palestinians depend on. To borrow from an old women's movement adage, the 'personal' experiences of Palestinian men are in fact 'political'.

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Coping, Closure, and Gendered Life Transitions

This report emerges as part of a decade of on-going study by Fafo of Palestinians' coping strategies under Israel's closure regime and continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This regime has had varying effects on different Palestinians. One such effect is the erosion of well-remunerated male breadwinning work. By examining Palestinians' life transitions into adulthood through a gendered lens, this report seeks to better understand the effects of closure on Palestinian men and women as they seek to secure their lives and livelihoods. Drawing on qualitative interviews, statistical data and academic literature from the region, the report examines how men and women are faring in terms of educational attainment, labor force participation and the transition to marriage. As more and more Palestinians pursue higher education, Palestinian women in particular are outnumbering men in enrollment, outstripping them academically, and changing gender relations. While men's social and economic position may be declining and women's roles may be expanding, this report examines how both genders are faring.

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