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EDITORIAL

THE MIDDLE EAST. LOCAL DYNAMICS, REGIONAL ACTORS, GLOBAL CHALLENGES

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EDITORIAL

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This dossier gathers articles by five graduates from the Master in International Studies, based at ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon. The students came from different disciplines and academic backgrounds, but in spite of their heterogeneous approaches and perspectives, they have found a common field, namely a critical analysis of some of the most contradictory and conflicted political and social dynamics occurring in the contemporary Middle East and affecting also neighbouring countries. All the authors have started their research due to personal interest and curiosity, with the aim of making the complexity of such diverse contexts in the region visible and intelligible.

In recent times, Middle Eastern Studies have increasingly taken up a relevant role in academia, particularly in a interdisciplinary framework. By deeply analysing the interactions of the region with the current globalised world, this area of study has attempted to break down traditional barriers among disciplines and to examine relations and linkages that are present across the region. More in detail, the field of Middle Eastern politics has developed specific interests and concerns both at the global and at the regional level. Within a context defined by the most internationally recognised events and junctures in the last twenty years, from the 9/11 attacks and the following Iraq invasion in 2003 to the Arab uprisings of 2011 and the most recent withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021, domestic, regional and global levels of analysis have been taken into account in the academic and political discourses.

The emergence of regional powers has also been crucial to understanding the most recent panorama, as new geo-political interests and strategies throughout the region have increased the role of growing regional actors, including Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, as well as of rising international players, such as Russia and China. This has demonstrated how the political and economic influence of the Middle East has developed, as a major consequence of the centrality of the region in global politics.

In parallel, the study of this area of the world has been improved and transformed in the past decades. Historically dominated in particular by issues such as war and nation



states, Middle Eastern studies, and more specifically the field of Middle Eastern politics, have more recently been directed towards further and heterogenous research interests, including also wider perspectives concerning contentious actors and politics from below. This has allowed for the growth of several sub-fields that have recognised different angles and topics related to the region, from women's rights and gender equality to ongoing sectarian tensions, from the increase of diverse forms of Islamism to the revival of nationalist and authoritarian narratives, on the one hand, and the rise of social movements practices, on the other.

Within this interdisciplinary background, this special issue intends to highlight the importance of dealing with various lenses along with diverse theoretical and methodological tools, in the process of interpreting the complexity of each peculiar context within the region. According to the main goals of the Master in International Studies at ISCTE in terms of knowledge and skills, the five articles originate from the best dissertations in this area of study defended during the academic year 2019-20.

Mostly based on qualitative approaches, these papers are the product of extensive research on the most relevant topics focused on current tensions, conflicts, challenges, and turmoils, ongoing in several countries of the Middle East. Although these Master's students have worked on very specific issues, all of them have been able to contextualise each unstable and challenging reality present in the heterogeneity characterising the region. As a result, the common thread of this special issue is a critically analysis of the complex, controversial and challenging socio-political dynamics occurring in the contemporary Middle East and neighbouring areas, such as in particular the European border with Greece.

Starting with one of the most intractable concerns of our times, namely the Palestinian question, two authors have approached it in a complementary way by using different disciplinary and methodological perspectives. In the first article of the dossier, João Borralho deeply analyses the normalised relationship between Egypt and Israel in the Gaza Strip, with a specific focus on the meaning of governing under siege. In the second article, Mafalda Young stresses the importance of Palestinian graffiti as a powerful tool of resistance against the ongoing Israeli military occupation, and how it has historically and politically evolved since the first Intifada. By tackling another central framework related to the political and social dynamics of the region, the third and fourth articles highlight the relevance of working from a gendered perspective. In the third article Elisabete Domingues deals in detail with the role of women in the current Yemeni conflict resolution process, both through formal and informal tools. In the fourth article, Joana Fernandes examines the status of women's citizenship and rights in Saudi Arabia, while comparing their current achievements with the case of Sophia - the female-looking non-human being that was recognised as a Saudi citizen in 2017. Moving towards the borders with the European Union, the last article by Claire Felix aims to give voice to the unheard narratives of refugees coming mostly from Middle Eastern countries to Europe by passing through Greece, and to question current European asylum and migration policies.

In a wider and interdisciplinary sense, this special issue intends to contribute to the contemporary literature regarding the Middle East and its intertwined realities, along with the main ongoing challenges. All these contributions, founded on original theoretical and empirical studies, seek to underline the necessity of creating new spaces, new debates,



and new opportunities for young researchers in order to become more visible and engaged in this area of study. Indeed, these five young authors can profoundly enrich and become actively part of the Portuguese academia working on these topics.

Lisbon, January 10, 2022

COPING WITH EGYPT'S AND ISRAEL NORMALISATION PROCESS: GAZA STRIP SIEGE AND HAMAS GOVERNANCE

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Abstract

Over the last fourteen years, the Gaza Strip has been under a land, sea and air siege imposed by Israel and Egypt. Throughout these years, Palestinians from the Gaza Strip have endured three Israeli military operations inside a besieged territory and have seen their lives becoming increasingly hard to bear. Moreover, to contain 2 million people inside a 365 km² enclave, Israel has received continuous support from Egypt. Hence, the article's focus is the Egyptian-Israeli relationship from 1981 to 2017, the Gaza Strip siege, the Hamas governance and how the asymmetric relations between Egypt and Israel with Gaza and its inhabitants materialise. Furthermore, due to events such as the peace treaties signed between Israel with United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan, Israel's refusal to let Covid-19 vaccines entering the Gaza Strip and the election of Israel's new coalition government, the topics examined in this article are increasingly relevant.

Keywords

Gaza Strip Siege, Normalisation Policy, Israel Egypt, Foreign Policy

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COPING WITH EGYPT'S AND ISRAEL NORMALISATION PROCESS: GAZA STRIP SIEGE AND HAMAS GOVERNANCE

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Introduction

The Egyptian-Israeli relation has been complex and very dynamic ever since Israel's State creation in 1948. On the one hand, Egypt fought four wars with Israel; on the other, it signed a Peace Treaty in 1979, breaking the Arab consensus of isolating Israel and eroding the Palestinian cause (Stein, 1997: 315). Hereafter, a growing policy of normalization between these two countries has been taking place where, currently, Egypt is supporting Israel's siege¹ of the Gaza Strip. This is important since one of the article's primary goals is to understand the contemporary situation in the Gaza Strip, and this can only be done if the context that helped to produce the present-day Gaza is considered.

Therefore, the article will analyze the dynamics between Egypt, Israel and the Gaza Strip to understand how (i) the Egyptian-Israeli relationship has always helped or hindered conditions in this territory, (ii) how the siege has detrimental consequences for the territory, and (iii) how Hamas has been governing the enclave throughout the fourteen years of siege. This is relevant because the article addresses these topics as interconnected issues, which helps develop the existing research in the Portuguese academia and overcome the lack of understanding of the Hamas government and the Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. As Sara Roy frames it, "(...) reality is always far more complex, differentiated, and irreducible than the stereotypes that are typically constructed for us" (2011: 17). Therefore, in this article, I tried to make understandable the power dynamics happening between these units, to demonstrate what is happening inside the Gaza Strip and how, as the title demonstrates, is the Hamas government coping with the ongoing siege.

To achieve this, it is essential to consider the following consequences from the start: 80% of the population is dependent on aid; 44% is unemployed; 40% is considered to be poor; 60% is food insecure; access to safe drinking water fell 98.3% from 2000 to 10.5% in 2014; 45% of essential medicines are not available; and, in average, there are only 2 hours per day of electricity (UN Report, 2017: 20; B'Tselem, 2017: 1). Moreover, doubling down on this dire situation, Palestinians cannot leave the Gaza Strip (due to the

¹ According to Ron J. Smith, a siege is a "(...) measure which is put in place from the state level upon populations who see their basic needs, liberties and freedom denied with the aim of leading to political change" and that in the case of Palestine is also a "subset of occupation practices" (2016: 750).



siege), rendering them powerless to travel or look for a better future overseas. These numbers and the awareness that Israel, were it not for Egypt's help, could not cause such a humanitarian disaster inside the Gaza Strip leads to the question: "How has Egypt foreign policy towards Gaza evolved from 2006 to 2017?" (Borralho, 2020: 2). This, together with an analysis of Egyptian-Israeli relations, will be answered in the following sections of the article.

1. Mubarak's Rule: Following President Sadat's Legacy and Beyond

Hosni Mubarak came to power after the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, and if he was not the one who signed the 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel, he was the one who executed it and made it a pillar of Egypt's foreign policy in the region. What would this mean to the Palestinians and their national movement? What changed in Egypt's foreign policy towards Israel and Palestine?

Three levels of analysis must be considered (Borralho, 2020; Abadi, 2006). First, the Egyptian government's foreign policy (political, diplomatic, economic and security dimensions). Second, Egyptian civil society, meaning that it is critical to understand whether Egyptian society has had the agency to constrain the governments' foreign policy or not. Third and last are the external constraints (neighbouring Arab countries). Besides these three levels, it is important to bear in mind that during Mubarak's rule, he had three major goals that also impacted his ability to make decisions: the improvement of Egypt's economy; recovering Egypt's status as the leading nation of the Arab world; and the conservation of USA support for his regime (which would only happen through the conservation of the peace treaty with Israel) (Kenneth Stein, 1997: 319; Ewan Stein, 2011: 739). With this in mind, Mubarak's foreign policy has been divided into three stages: 1981 to 1993, 1993 to 2006 and 2006 to 2011 (Borralho, 2020: 18). Throughout these three stages, Egypt's relationship with Israel progressed from 'cold peace' to 'strategic peace' (Aran and Ginat, 2014)².

1.1. Three-stage Relationship with Israel

In the first stage (1981 to 1993), Mubarak's regime faced several constraints imposed by Israel that caused and maintained the cold peace. For instance, Israel's 1981 bombing of Iraq's nuclear facilities; the invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and the Sabra and Shatila massacre of Palestinians; Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem; settlements expansion in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt); the backlash against Palestinians during the First Intifada (Stein, 1997: 306). These events, among others, hindered the relationship on the state-level, alienated Egyptian civil society's support of relations with Israel and increased the support for the Palestinian cause. Moreover, Mubarak's goal of regaining the confidence of the Arab neighbours (that had expelled Egypt from the Arab League in 1979) led him to take measures to reduce to a minimum the social and economic integration of both countries (Borralho, 2020: 20). In sum, the first stage was where

² Strategic peace is an intermediary stage between cold peace and stable peace. Therefore, it should be understood in a continuum wherein one side is cold peace and the other stable peace.



Mubarak most felt compelled by the domestic and external constraints and where he most vividly linked the Palestinian progress (or lack of it) to the normalization of ties with Israel. For these reasons, and although the peace treaty was working because neither would resort to war, their relations were cold.

The second stage (1993 to 2006) should still be understood within the cold peace perspective for reasons such as the backlash against Palestinians during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, the electoral victory of the Likud Party, Israeli Operation Deterrent Shield in the oPt, and finally, due to Egypt's civil society pressure (Stein, 1997: 313; Stein, 2011: 751; Khani, 2013: 102). Nevertheless, Egyptian-Israeli relations still improved on the state-level for three main reasons. The first was the USA's policy change towards Mubarak's regime from conflict reduction to mutual strategic interests. Consequently, Egyptian-Israeli relations not only improved (as a consequence of their common links to the USA), but Egypt became a peace mediator of the political dialogue between Palestinians and the Israelis (Aran and Ginat, 2014: 566). The second reason, which came to consolidate the first, was the Oslo Accords. Mubarak instrumentalized them in his favour and pursued his mediator role between Israel and the PLO and other Arab countries (Abou-El-Fadl, 2012: 10). With this, he successfully legitimized the growing relations on the state-level and made Egypt the "(...) central axis for influencing Arab attitudes and the pace of Arab normalization with Israel" (Stein, 1997: 313). Lastly, Iran also played a role in Egyptian-Israeli relations because both countries saw Iran as an enemy to the status-quo that the peace treaty and USA foreign policy had positively brought them (Aran and Ginat, 2014: 15). Therefore, and although still self-conscious of Egypt's civil society agency's constraints, Mubarak's foreign policy gradually changed during this stage.

On the third and last stage, the former cold peace evolved into strategic peace. Two events must be acknowledged as the most important regarding Mubarak's foreign policy towards the Gaza Strip and its inhabitants. The first was Hamas' electoral victory in the 2006 Palestinians Elections and consequent siege, and the second was his compliance with Israel during Operation Cast Lead (OCL) in 2009.

To understand Mubarak's stance on Hamas, it is important to know that he was losing popularity inside Egypt to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)³. Mubarak depicted the MB as an illegal organization that exploited religion and the fragility of citizens to accomplish their goals (Meital, 2010: 179). He did the same towards Hamas with the aggravating that he saw them as a proxy of Iran. For this reason, when Hamas won the Palestinian elections and took over the Gaza Strip, Egypt followed Israel's decision to commence a siege into this territory with complete disregard of the consequences for the Palestinian citizens by closing the Rafah crossing⁴.

What is more, intending to lead to political change, Egypt and Israel's security and intelligence sharing coordination reached hitherto unknown levels (Borralho, 2020: 24).

³ The relationship between Hamas and the MB originates from the fact that the first is a product of the Political Bureau of the latter that existed in Gaza since 1946. During the first Intifada, Palestinian MB changed from their non-violent approach to actively support and participate in confrontation with the Israeli occupier, which led to the creation of the Islamic Resistance Movement, whose acronym in Arabic is Hamas (Hroub, 2002).

⁴ Egypt's border with the Gaza Strip.



This siege sealed the Gaza Strip from the rest of the world, aggravating an already dire economic situation and increasing the humanitarian distress of Palestinians. To circumvent this situation, Hamas started to build illegal tunnels on the border with Egypt that helped them to evade, for a while, the worst effects of the siege. This changed when Israel initiated the OCL (2008-2009) following a violation of their ceasefire with Hamas. After twenty-six days of Israel's offensive inside the Gaza Strip that killed 1,400 Palestinians and injured more than 5,000 (on the Israeli side, nine soldiers were killed and 113 wounded) (PCHR, 2009: 6; Amnesty International, 2009: 6; B'Tselem, 2009: 3), Mubarak's decisions during and after Israel's military operations, increased the hardships inside the enclave⁵.

Along with his domestic policies, Mubarak's foreign policy started to stir Egyptian civil society like never before. Mubarak had indeed achieved strategic peace with Israel but forgot how critical the need to balance the domestic constraints was (Borralho, 2020: 28). Egyptian civil society took the few public demonstrations authorized in favour of Palestine to their advantage to initiate their struggle against Mubarak's regime. The Egyptian Arab Spring had begun, and "(...) Palestine's activism became an incubator for the protest movements that led (...) to the Egyptian uprising" and Mubarak's fall (Abou-El-Fadl, 2012: 12).

2. President Morsi one-year in Power

Hailing from the Freedom and Justice Party⁶, President Morsi was democratically elected eighteen months after Mubarak's ouster. The first presidential election of someone from an Islamist party raised several questions. To the scope of this article, three are critical: what would this election mean to the Egyptian-Israeli relations? Would the Rafah crossing be open? Would he pursue the normalization process started by Mubarak?⁷

Morsi was fully aware of the importance that the Palestinian cause had to Egyptian society and the need to guarantee USA support for his presidency. He also knew that Mubarak's strategic partnership with Israel and the normalization process created too much domestic pressure (Borralho, 2020: 33). Mindful of this, Morsi adopted a pragmatic foreign policy, combining a populist internal discourse with a realistic approach towards Israel, the USA and Hamas. Two important events during the one-year presidency are proof of this.

The first event happened in August 2012, when after asking Israel's permission, Morsi sent the Army to the border with Gaza and ordered the destruction of several tunnels in response to the killing of 16 Egyptian soldiers in North Sinai by a group of militants with

⁵ Decisions such as the complete closure of the Rafah crossing during Israel's Operation; medical aid to Gaza was forbidden; increasing efforts to dismantle Hamas tunnels; from January to November 2009, the Rafah crossing was open only 33 days out of 301; humanitarian ships could not enter in the Gaza Strip after Israel's Operation was over; and, how the government tried to prevent Egyptian society from protesting in favour of Palestine (PCHR, 2009: 28; Khani, 2013: 109).

⁶ The MB established the Freedom and Justice Party in 2011 to participate in the first democratic elections in Egypt after the Arab Spring.

⁷ In a nation-wide speech, Morsi confirmed that he would comply with all international treaties previously signed (which includes the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty) and that Egypt would stand by the Palestinians and their quest for self-determination (Borralho, 2020: 32).



links to the Gaza Strip (Rigas, 2015: 4). Hamas understood Morsi's decision and stopped all operations throughout the tunnels, arrested several of its members, and let Egyptian authorities question three Hamas leaders linked to this militant group (Rigas, 2015: 4). This first event shows three things: Morsi pragmatic policy made him willing to disregard any religious or ideological links with Hamas if necessary; he adopted a moderate foreign policy towards Israel and even reached new security agreements; Hamas understood Morsi's (fragile) position and tried to help him (Rigas, 2015: 5).

The second event, which bluntly showed how Morsi differed from Mubarak's policies towards the Gaza Strip, was Israel's second major Operation in Gaza, named Operation Pillar of Defense (OPD)⁸, in November 2012. Instead of blaming Hamas for the eruption of the conflict and sidelining them to reach a ceasefire directly with Israel (as done by Mubarak), Morsi recalled his ambassador from Israel and called Khaled Meshaal (Hamas' Leader) to Cairo in order to discuss a ceasefire while doing the same with Israel (Rigas, 2015: 6). These endeavors resulted in the shortest Israeli operation, and fewer victims since the Gaza Strip siege was initiated. Morsi also tried to reconcile Hamas and Fatah because he believed that the Palestinian cause could only succeed if a peace agreement were to be achieved (Borralho, 2020: 34).

However, these are indeed the highlights of a one-year government. If we look at the day-to-day changes instead, it is important to know that Morsi did not fulfil Hamas and Palestinians' expectations in Gaza. In fact, the expectation that the Rafah border would be open continuously for people and commercial purposes never happened. Even more, Morsi reached new security agreements with Israel and kept the economic ones⁹. Indeed, he did not pursue the normalization process and resumed a colder stance; however, the structural changes expected to help the Gaza Strip did not materialize (Borralho, 2020: 35). In sum, Morsi's first and most important goal was to consolidate domestic and international support for his presidency. This failed when Morsi was ousted and sent to jail in a military coup on the 3rd of July 2013.

3. President Sisi: The Crowning of the Normalization Process

The new Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, started by suspending the Constitution and dissolving Parliament. After that, Sisi named the MB as a terrorist organization, a designation he also attached to Hamas (Siddiqui, 2016: 2). This was the beginning of his struggle against political Islam, which both the MB in Egypt and the Hamas in the Gaza Strip embodied. Adding to this, Sisi quickly adopted a foreign policy towards Israel that transcended Mubarak's strategic partnership and reached the rapprochement at the state level (Borralho, 2020: 36).

⁸ This Operation lasted eight days, and although there was no ground invasion, 167 Palestinians were killed (including 87 civilians and 32 minors). In addition, four Israeli civilians and two security services personnel were killed by Hamas rockets (B'Tselem, 2013: 3).

⁹ One of the most important economic deals kept by Morsi was the Qualified Industrial Zone agreement (signed by Mubarak's government in December 2004) that allowed Egypt to access the USA market on a duty-free basis as long as the products made in Egypt contained at least 11.7 per cent of Israeli components (Aran and Ginat, 2014: 27).



Besides the fight against political Islam, Sisi promoted this rapprochement through common geostrategic concerns and economic deals (Borralho, 2020). Consequently, a centripetal dynamic between Sisi and Netanyahu grew, and several foreign policies were taken by both countries that impacted their relationship and the Gaza Strip. It is also important to consider how instability in the Sinai Peninsula, a buffer zone between Egypt and Israel, has impacted this dynamic. For instance, Sisi sent his Foreign-Minister in a visit to Jerusalem (the first visit in a decade) to discuss Israel's and Egypt's ties in the fight against terrorism and the sharing of intelligence on the Egyptian-Palestinian border (Siddiqui, 2016: 12); Israel re-opened its Embassy in Cairo and Sisi sent a new ambassador to Israel after three years of vacancy; Netanyahu allowed Egypt to deploy more troops in the Sinai Peninsula (Agdemir, 2016: 226).

Nevertheless, what has grounded Sisi's and Netanyahu's centripetal dynamics was Hamas as their common enemy. To start, Sisi made a buffer zone between Sinai and Gaza that Israeli leaders had called for years to hinder Hamas governance. During this process, hundreds of tunnels from Gaza to Sinai were destroyed, worsening the enclave's humanitarian and economic situation. If the public discourse was against Hamas and not Palestinians, the fact is that these decisions especially hurt the Palestinian society. The situation deteriorated again when Israel decided to start the third and biggest military assault in less than six years in the Gaza Strip. Sisi stood beside Israel and against Hamas (Borralho, 2020: 39).

3.1. Operation Protective Edge

The events that led to Operation Protective Edge's (OPE) eruption are not settled among scholars. Some scholars blame Hamas for Israel's military operation, and others blame Israel. More than to discuss who escalated to the point where Israel initiated another military operation in Gaza, it is important to strip the western narrative that often sees Hamas as the only one to blame in what goes wrong in this asymmetric fight with Israel. In fact, the decisions taken by Hamas do not happen in a void but instead in a structure where Hamas is one of several actors (Borralho, 2020: 40). Within this structure, we find Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinian Authority. All the processes that happen between them are an outcome of their behavior altogether and not only Hamas.

With this in mind, OPE started on the 8th of July 2014 and ended on the 26th of August 2014 after the USA and European Union mediation. Throughout the fifty-one days that this military operation took place, the asymmetry on the numbers demonstrate how Israel premeditated the destruction that they would cause by bombing a besieged enclave from where people cannot escape. For instance, 2,251 Palestinians (including 1,462 civilians) were killed; 551 and 299 of the Palestinians killed were children and women, respectively; 11,231 Palestinians were injured; 1,500 Palestinians were left orphaned; 18,000 house units were destroyed; 108,000 Palestinians became homeless (OCHA, 2015: 2; Filiu, 2014: 58). Six civilians died due to Hamas rockets on the Israeli side, 67 soldiers were killed inside the enclave, and 1,600 Israelis were injured (including 270 children) (OCHA, 2015). What can explain this asymmetry? How has Egypt reacted to this?



This asymmetry is not only explained but also justified by Israeli officials as correct. To be more precise, Israeli General Eisenkot explained that to groups such as Hamas or Hezbollah, the plan approved was the Dahiya doctrine. This doctrine consists of the use of "disproportionate force" to "(...) cause great damage and destruction" (Khalidi, 2010: 18)¹⁰. When faced with many civilians' deaths, Israel argued that they were "collateral damage". Israeli officials also claim that it was the Palestinians' responsibility to get out of those places because they used preventive warning techniques before the bombings. In other words, Israel shifted the responsibility of killing civilians from its decisions to the victims (Borralho, 2020). With this justification and by framing the Dahiya doctrine within the "war on terror", Israel feels that the killing and destruction are justified, despite being in breach of international law and the Geneva Convention (Borralho, 2020). Does this mean that Hamas launch of rockets towards Israel is justified? Not at all. Hamas is not immune to the possibility of having committed war crimes like Israel. However, it is crucial to establish the asymmetry in the numbers and military capacities between Hamas and Israel. Hamas is at fault, but Israel's instrumentalization of Hamas rockets to justify the atrocities made in Gaza should not be permitted (Borralho, 2020: 42).

Making Gaza's situation worse, this operation was undertaken with total agreement of Sisi that, at the same time, was destroying tunnels and waging military operations in the Sinai Peninsula. In sum, since Sisi came to power, a policy of normalization has been pursued and successfully achieved on the state-level. Moreover, Sisi returned to Mubarak's approach of non-dialogue with Hamas leaders and instead spoke with the PA when he seemed fit. At the societal level, Egyptians were now and for the first time in decades, more distant and less active in their support for Palestine, which can be explained through the authoritarian and repressive military regime that Sisi established¹¹. Nevertheless, during the atrocities of OPE, Egyptians came back to the streets in support of Palestine. To conclude, this operation and Sisi's foreign policy towards Gaza and Israel pushed Gaza's dire situation to new levels (Borralho, 2020: 43).

4. Gaza Strip: Governing under Siege

Having seen how Egyptian foreign policy evolved since 1981 towards the Gaza Strip and Israel, it is important to look inside the enclave to understand how Hamas and Palestinians have been coping with the siege undertaken by Israel and Egypt. For this reason, it is critical to know that Gaza is, according to the United Nations, the Human Rights Watch and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), still occupied by Israel despite the 2005 unilateral disengagement plan. Knowing this, it is easier to deconstruct Hamas governance, the de-development of Gaza and evaluate accountability between Israel and Hamas (Borralho, 2020: 45). The main argument of these organizations is that despite no physical presence on the ground, Israel's capacity of exerting its power and impositions into the territory and its inhabitants is what counts

¹⁰ Several human rights organizations (such as the Human Rights Watch) classify this strategy as a "serious violation of international law" since it is "indiscriminate, disproportionate, and otherwise unjustified" (Buttu, 2014, apud HRW, 2007: 13; Borralho, 2020: 42).

¹¹ For instance, after Morsi's ouster, the Egyptian army killed more than 600 protesters and injured 4,000 (Siddiqui, 2016: 8). Afterwards, the new military regime also sentenced, in March and April 2014, more than 1,000 Morsi supporters to death (Watanabe, 2014: 4).



the most (HRW, 2017: 40; ICRC, 2015: 12)¹². Therefore, adding to the ongoing occupation, to the siege, the military operations, the withdrawal of international aid, the withholding of tax revenues by Israel and the international boycott of their government (Borralho, 2020), what constraints have Hamas faced inside the Gaza Strip that hindered their ability to govern?

After forming a government, Hamas knew that their government legitimacy was linked to their capacity to govern successfully and fulfil their electoral promises¹³ (Borralho, 2020: 49). Therefore, they set themselves out to resolve the most critical issues and started by restoring order and the rule of law. For that, Hamas took a violent approach towards militias and clans whereby, in two years, they were capable of removing them from the streets of Gaza and regained the monopoly over the use of force (Filiu, 2014: 331; Kear, 2019: 166). Regarding the rule of law, Hamas kept the secular system but added the informal system based on the Sharia (Kear, 2019: 159)¹⁴. By having two systems, which Palestinians could always use, Hamas improved the settlement of disputes and ensured the enclaves' 'Soft-Islamisation' (Brenner, 2017: 196). It is important to highlight that Hamas' conception of law and order was only achieved by reviving Islamic values and prioritizing the social order at the expense of individual rights. This does not mean that individual rights were not respected by Hamas, however, and as Brenner frames it, "rights and freedoms of the individual (...) were considered to be an effect, rather than a prerequisite, of the 'correct' ordering of society" (2017: 181).

Afterwards, Hamas worked to stop the increasing soft-power that Salafi-Jihadi groups were attaining among several Gaza inhabitants (Kear, 2019: 156). There are different reasons for these groups' soft-power inside the enclave. Namely: Hamas' de-radicalization; openness to negotiating and reach ceasefires with Israel; increased pragmatism (which can be seen by the fact that Hamas changed from their initial aim of re-conquering historic Palestine to establishing Palestine in the 1967 territories occupied by Israel) (Borralho, 2020: 49). These decisions were not accepted by some Hamas militants and former Palestinian Islamic groups under Hamas' sphere of influence, especially considering that Hamas had for their whole existence denounced Fatah and the PLO for doing the same, leading to increase disenfranchisement, alienation, and the questioning of Hamas ideological and religious legitimacy (Kear, 2019: 151). In sum, Salafi-Jihadi groups attained a broad support base from Gaza inhabitants due to the perception that Hamas became as complicit as Fatah in continuing the occupation

¹² HRW gives the following examples about Israel's capacity to exert its power: "(...) control of movement into and out of the enclave, of Gaza's territorial waters and airspace (not letting Palestinians operate an airport or seaport) (...) controls the Palestinian population registry, the taxes that collects on behalf of the PA and the 'no-go' zones inside Gaza (...)" (HRW, 2017: 37).

¹³ The most important electoral promises were: restore the rule of law and order; respect public liberties and individual rights; reform the legal system; end corruption; curb down on more radical and militant Salafi-Jihadist movements; end the militias and clans' disputes; fulfil a 'Soft-Islamization' of Gaza; and the implementation of an Islamic Democracy (Borralho, 2020: 49).

¹⁴ The informal system based on the Sharia was a Hamas measure to restore societal security and to alleviate some of the government's administrative burden (after the PA in Ramallah had ordered, in 2006, that their employees in the Gaza Strip boycotted the legal system, leading to its collapse). As a result, Hamas's government created a system with 36 conciliation committees, each supervised by a religious scholar, with the primary function of resolving community disputes (Kear, 2019: 160). As their rulings had no official legal legitimacy, Hamas used the Sharia as an acceptable form of community justice.



through collaboration with Israel (Kear, 2019: 151). In addition, the socio-economic difficulties also increased these groups' support base.

To counter the Salafi-Jihadi soft-power, Hamas started by taking two approaches towards these groups. The first was mediation, and the second was confrontation¹⁵. These demonstrated that Hamas was not prepared to see its authority over Gaza questioned. However, in the long run, Hamas also understood that these approaches would not resolve the problem. For this reason, they took a multi-dimensional approach. First, they regained the control and monopoly of Gaza's mosques (and replaced Salafi-Jihadi imams by imams loyal to Hamas to control what was preached to Palestinians) where they controlled the collection and distribution of aid (Kear, 2019: 156). This increased Hamas soft-power. Second, Hamas created a plan of de-radicalization for Salafi-Jihadi members and counter-radicalization for the ordinary Palestinian that showed some support for these groups (Brenner, 2017: 114). In sum, Hamas restored their ideological and religious hegemony, re-established law, order and security, and finally, kept Gaza's humanitarian situation floating.

Of all the electoral promises, the implementation of an Islamic democracy is the most difficult to answer whether they were successful or not. To start, it is important to remember all the internal and external constraints imposed on the Hamas government. Secondly, if Hamas' governance is analysed through Western lens and the concept of liberal democracy, the answer will always be negative. Therefore, it is critical to understand all the processes inside the Gaza Strip and Hamas government decisions from within their specific political and social-economic context that invariably defines their reality (Roy, 2011: 17). With this in mind, and in order to understand if Hamas implemented an Islamic democracy, we should frame Hamas decisions in a continuum where, on one side, we have an Islamic-Theocracy and on the other an Islamic-Democracy (Brenner, 2017: 14). While it is true that Hamas did not establish an Islamic-Democracy per se, as they promised, they should not be accused of being an authoritarian regime. Instead, what guided their decisions was the ever-present goal of consolidation of power and control of the Gaza Strip (Brenner, 2017: 190). To achieve this, the Hamas government changed their decisions contingent on the challenges it faced. For instance, it is fair to say that in areas such as education, the legal system and social morality, the Hamas government embraced a more flexible and moderated posture (Kear, 2019: 274). In addition, the 'Soft-Islamization' was also pursued, as seen before, but without jeopardising Gazans support for their government¹⁶. Nonetheless, it is also important to acknowledge that concerns "(...) as safeguarding residents' civil and political

¹⁵ One example of Hamas' mediation happened when the Jaysh al-Islam group – who openly opposed Hamas – kidnapped three foreigners and students of the Gaza City's University (Brenner, 2017: 84). As a counter-measure, Hamas besieged the clan's entire neighbourhood demonstrating their strength. This led to a cease-fire that assured the release of all the students and foreigners, but that gave, as well, the possibility to Jaysh al-Islam group of retaining some arms for resistance purposes against Israel (Brenner, 2017: 87). When mediation was not successful, confrontation was the second-best option. This happened when the Jund Ansar Allah group declared the creation of an Islamic emirate of Palestine after a sequence of violent attacks inside the Gaza Strip and against Israel. Hamas reacted by killing the group's leaders and several of their militants, besides seizing all of their weapons (Brenner, 2017: 90).

¹⁶ For instance, in 2009, Hamas withdrew their decision of implementing gender separation, obligatory hijab for female university students and lawyers in the courts and a ban on women smoking shisha in public spaces after public demonstrations against these decisions (Brenner, 2017: 98).



rights (...) were of secondary importance” (Brenner, 2017: 190). Consequently, it is possible to conclude that the shifts in Hamas’s behaviour and/or decisions resulted in continuous movement along the Islamic-Theocracy/Islamic-Democracy continuum (Brenner, 2017: 191; Kear, 2019: 273).

Conclusion

The research reported here is important because it strives to fill the gap when studying the Gaza Strip, its inhabitants and Hamas while being subject to a siege that limits and defines their lives. This is why the relationship and policy of normalization between Gaza’s two only neighbours’ – Egypt and Israel – is an essential part of the article. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that I have left out other important topics such as the ongoing conflict between Hamas and Fatah, which also works against the well-being of Palestinians, and the instability in the Sinai Peninsula (that has contributed to the centripetal dynamics between the Egyptian and Israeli governments). Even so, and despite more topics that could have been researched, no other topic created the ongoing humanitarian disaster besides the Israeli and Egyptian siege.

The current situation is so vicious that the United Nations considered the enclave unlivable by 2020 (UN Report, 2017: 3). The siege transformed the Gaza Strip in what Giorgio Agamben describes as the ‘camp’, meaning, a physical space where “(...) its inhabitants were stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life” (1995: 168). In practical terms, this means that Palestinians from this territory have been stripped of their rights, specifically to a dignified, peaceful and meaningful life. Proofs of this are, for instance, the three major military incursions that Israel made against a besieged territory from which the civilians could not escape and the narrative used to frame and justify so many civilians’ deaths by shifting the responsibility to the victims. The number of deaths on both sides also attests to the asymmetric fight between Hamas and Israel. It should make us question how the siege and military incursions happened while the Israeli government is not made responsible for its actions. And, per consequence, also Egypt as it is complicit in what is happening. It is, therefore, essential to call out to the injustices perpetrated against Palestinians while investigating “(...) the juridical procedures and deployments of power by which human beings could be so completely deprived of their rights and prerogatives that no act committed against them could appear any longer as a crime” (Agamben, 1995: 168). Only by doing this can the current narrative of a symmetric fight between Hamas and Israel be refocused to reflect the asymmetry and unequal distribution of power between Israel, Egypt and Hamas.

To conclude, the article should be understood within a debate on the struggle for equality in Palestine and Israel and not further domination and denial. Hence, topics such as the asymmetry between Palestine and Israel, Sinai's Peninsula instability and links to the Gaza Strip, or, even in a broader and theoretical discussion, the deconstruction of the artificial clash of civilizations should be investigated in future academic research.



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THE ART OF RESISTANCE: ART AND RESISTANCE IN PALESTINE

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Abstract

Resistance can take many forms. In Palestine, to exist is to resist. For the last fifty-four years Palestinians have found many inventive and innovative ways to resist the Israeli occupation, and one of those ways, but certainly not the only, is art. Palestinian art and the Israeli occupation walk hand in hand inasmuch that and the historical and political encounters of the conflict have influenced the Palestinian cultural scene and vice versa. This article aims to explore how art, in its various forms, is part of the arsenal of everyday resistance techniques employed by the Palestinian. It addresses not only how art has challenged the outcomes of the conflict, but also how the conflict has impacted the Palestinian artistic scene. To this end, it explores the case of contemporary Palestinian graffiti as a relevant tool of resistance that provides an insight into the nature of Palestinian resistance but also into the evolution of the conflict itself.

Keywords

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Political Art, Palestinian Art, Graffiti, Everyday Resistance.

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THE ART OF RESISTANCE: ART AND RESISTANCE IN PALESTINE

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Introduction

Art has always been a space where communities express their political-ideological beliefs and advocate for change. In all its forms, artistic production has been used as a tool of socio-political struggle and as a catalyst for mobilization and dissent, and in this Palestine is no exception. Living under harsh conditions of violence, repression and censorship, Palestinians have found in art one of their most important and empowering tools of nonviolent resistance to the Israeli occupation.

Through art, Palestinians have challenged the hegemony of the Zionist narrative and its associated attempts to deny their existence. Furthermore, art has contributed to the construction of the Palestinians sense of togetherness and national identity and has been one of the driving forces behind many relevant moments in the history of Palestinian resistance by mobilizing Palestinians to act.

This article, which is derived from my Master's dissertation in International Studies at ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, offers an overview of the Palestinian resistance art production under occupation, with a special focus in *graffiti*. The political role and characteristics of Palestinian *graffiti* have evolved throughout the conflict with its most expressive form being reached in two historic moments: The First Intifada and after the construction of the Separation Wall.

As an object of study, *graffiti* can offer a great level of understanding about the artist's motivation, ideology and political aspirations, but also about community concerns and issues. According to James Scott (1985), the intentionality behind an act of resistance is often a better indicator of resistance than the outcome derived from the act itself (Scott, 1985: 290). With this in mind, and driven by a willingness to understand the meaning, intentionality and personal experiences behind artistic creations in Palestine, an interview of a young Palestinian *graffiti* artist was conducted. Through a phenomenological approach, my goal was to understand the intentions behind the artist's creations as well as the reasons that led him to represent certain symbolic elements instead of others. Deriving from a post-positivist interpretive perspective, this article develops a comparative analysis of three murals produced by Mohamd Alraee. It focuses on the signs and symbols used by the artist, relates them to the Palestinian context and resistance history and, finally, offers a semiotic interpretation of their meaning.

The analysis of Palestinian *graffiti* does not intend, by any means, to disregard the political and activist art produced by countless Israeli artists or those from neighbouring



countries that might have strongly influenced the Palestinian cultural scene. It aims, instead, to delve into the characteristics that are unique to Palestinian resistance efforts, and hopefully offer a deeper understanding of the state of the Palestinian resistance movement of today.

1. Everyday Resistance and the Palestinian Sumud

Because resistance is a socially constructed concept, in which different actors, observers and dimensions contribute to its understanding, it has no broadly accepted definition (Gordon, 1993: 142). However, social scientists seem to generally accept that resistance is an “oppositional act”, where an active behaviour (either verbal, cognitive or physical) and a sense of opposing, questioning, and challenging the existing power structures are expected (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004: 538).

According to Foucault, “if there is power there is resistance and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power” (Foucault, 1978: 95), meaning that the relationship between power and resistance is not static but rather cyclical and dynamic (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004: 548). This “mutually constitutive” relationship evolves over time and as the power dynamics change rulers look for new and ingenious ways to control the oppressed who, in turn, adapt their resistance strategies to the new context (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013: 31).

Although power structures tend to be favourable to those in power, the power dynamics are not always defined by power holders. According to the *theory of consent*, the authority of any ruler is dependent on the voluntary obedience of the ruled, meaning that by withdrawing this consent through resistance, opposers are limiting the degree of support the governing can count on (Dudouet, 2008: 4; Hardt & Negri, 2004: 54).

This theory may explain the power dynamics in democratic systems. However, in undemocratic and oppressive contexts, the tangible effects of resistance are limited and opportunities to openly resist are scarce (McAdam & Tarrow, 2000: 151; Zunes, 1994: 420). Therefore, resistance may be overt and recognizable as such, but it may also be covert and intended to go unnoticed. Depending on the socio-political circumstances, resisters may be encouraged to strategically manipulate their behavior to avoid recognition and escape retaliation from those in power (Hollander & Einwohner, 2004: 540-545).

This is often the case with less obvious forms of opposition such as “everyday forms of resistance”. According to James Scott (1985), who first coined the term, “everyday resistance” encompasses a set of acts or resistance activities that are ordinary and mundane in its nature (Scott, 1989: 33-34). They are often adopted by those who, due to a lack of resources or opportunities, mask the rebellious nature of their acts while continuing to resist (Scott, 1985: xvi).

This is often the case with humour, songs, or literature when used to covertly express resistance within a context of censorship and punishment (Sanger, 1995: 179; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004: 540). Without being “politically articulated or formally organized”, everyday resistance can prepare the ground for more visible acts of resistance, such as demonstrations, protests and insurrections as these events often find their roots in



“stories, poems, songs, visual arts and other local acts of defiance and resistance, unseen by authorities or by outside observers” (Tripp, 2013a: 5; Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013: 10).

It is from a sense of *sumud*, i.e. an “active form of willingness to sacrifice oneself in order to achieve justice” that the Palestinian experience of everyday resistance emerges. *Sumud* is an “active form of popular resistance” that highlights “steadfastness, persistence and success in the face of adversity” and not mere passive tolerance (Qumsiyeh, 2011: 11). Simply by going through the mundane acts of daily life - laughing, crying, getting married, having children, going to school, tending their sheep in what remains of Palestine - Palestinians are resisting Israeli occupation (Qumsiyeh, 2011: 235).

2. Palestinian Art, Sumud and Everyday Resistance

It is often in culture that oppressed communities find the political space to express their ideas, opinions and emotions (Scott, 1990: xiii). Culture offers a safe alternative space where, through “hidden transcripts”, the weak can express themselves relatively freely within the existing power structures (Scott, 1990: 164-65). These “hidden transcripts”, in the form of literature, music, paintings and folklore, often provide the oppressed with the ideological underpinnings needed to rise up against their oppressor (Scott, 1990: 80).

Particularly in contexts of censorship, violence and occupation, cultural production is not only used to express political and ideological opposition, but also functions as memory tools in which historical episodes are remembered and values are passed on between generations (Salih & Richter-Devroe, 2014: 15; Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995: 127).

The ability to contribute to the collective memory is particularly relevant in the Palestinian context since the Zionist foundational myth deliberately erased the Palestinian presence from the land by framing it “as a land without a people to a people without a land” (Piterberg, 2001: 31).

Palestinian culture represents a challenge to this narrative. And if we agree with Hamdi’s interpretation that everything that helps to keep the idea of Palestine alive is a type of *sumud*, then artistic production certainly falls into this category (Hamdi, 2011: 40-41).

The potential of art as a form of everyday resistance rests on its ability to transform and shape the “political behavior among the Palestinians in their everyday resistance” (Ali, 2018: 148-9). By contributing to the embodiment of the Palestinian collective memory, to the communal sense of belonging to the land and to the emergence of innovative counter-narratives, artistic interventions may contribute to shaping the subaltern’s attitudes not only towards power holders but to resistance itself (Hamdi, 2011: 40-41; Tripp, 2013b: 16).

3. Palestinian resistance and the role of culture

From the beginning of the military occupation (1967), Israel has applied a range of techniques designed to assert control over the Palestinians, their land and its narrative



(Ali, 2018: 148). What began as the destruction of entire Palestinian villages in 1948¹ grew into an elaborate scheme of domination based on the construction of borders, checkpoints, and Israeli settlements along with house demolitions and land confiscations over the years (Ehrenreich, 2016: 206), accompanied by the establishment of a complex system of permits limiting movement across the Palestinian border that drastically curtail the flow of people and culture (Stiline, 2018: 50).

Between 1967 and 1993² a complex system of military censorship designed to destroy all social elements that could evoke the Palestinian collective memory, sense of community and belonging to the land was established (Swedenburg, 1989: 268). Israeli censorship of Palestinian self-expression went as far as prohibiting the raising of the Palestinian flag, the public display of Palestinian national symbols, such as the *kufiyya* (Palestinian head scarf), or the use of Palestinian national colors (red, white, and green) in artistic productions (González, 2009:205; Tripp, 2013b: 118). These impositions, however, made it easier for every Palestinian to engage in smaller acts of resistance. Flags, stickers and *graffiti* appeared everywhere. And in failing to prevent these acts from emerging, the image of control projected by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) was undermined (Tripp, 2013b: 118).

Because these gestures were smaller in nature they helped to engage a larger segment of the population who would otherwise not have been drawn into acts of resistance and were essential in preparing the ground for larger grassroots collective actions such as the First Intifada (Tripp, 2013b: 119-20).

In the Palestinian context, the creation of culture assumes a multitude of political functions, from mobilization, to evoking feelings of nationality, to bearing witness to the Israeli occupation (Tawil-Souri, 2011b: 6; McDonald, 2013: 31).

If art is crucial to the construction of community, national sentiments and shared narratives, the domination of artistic production is crucial to control the “publics’ shared imagination” (Tripp, 2013a: 187). To that end, the effort applied by the Israeli authorities into censoring cultural expression is nothing but testimony to the tangible effects of artistic resistance (Tripp, 2013b: 259-60).

The creation of the Palestinian League of Artists offers a good example. Ignoring the impact the League would have on the general public, Israeli authorities allowed its creation in 1973. This collective of artists organized group exhibitions which were considered as insignificant by the occupying forces. To the Palestinians, however, every piece of art made public in the presence of the Israelis became a source of “national pride and self-reassurance”. As these exhibitions came to be perceived as symbols of resistance, artists became targets of harassment and were often imprisoned and their works confiscated or subject to censorship (Boullata, 2004: 72).

As the possibilities of engaging in direct political activism are limited, Palestinian’s resort to cultural activism which, according to Ilan Pappé, equips Palestinian society with a

¹ This event also referred to as *Al-Nakba*, consisted on the destruction of more than 500 Palestinian villages and resulted in the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their land (Masalha, 2014: 34).

² Following the Six-day War in 1967, Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza, which lasted until the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, after which the Palestinians were given limited governance and autonomy: https://interactive.aljazeera.com/aje/palestineremix/timeline_main.html#tl-4.



“sense of internalized strength that the Israeli government cannot easily prevent nor erase” (Pappé, 2011: 75).

4. The Palestinian artistic landscape under military occupation

For the Palestinians, art is an integral part of resistance. And just as the political and historical events of the conflict have shaped the techniques of resistance, they have also impacted the aesthetics and themes embraced by the Palestinian cultural movement (Salih & Richter-Devroe, 2014: 9).

In 1948, following the *Nakba* – many Palestinians were forced to flee and became refugees scattered throughout the world. Those who stayed in Palestine, were now under the sovereignty of Israel, Egypt or Jordan. This geographical distribution of Palestinian society contributed to the weakening of its internal and political unity, and to the loss of a common cultural center. By being geographically dispersed, Palestinians had different experiences of the same conflict (Qumsiyeh, 2011: 236).

The first generation of Palestinian resistance artists emerged from this traumatic event, and so their experiences of loss, dispersal and destruction were strongly echoed their artistic output (Boulatta, 2004: 71). A new moment for Palestinian culture came with the creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization in 1964. With the appearance of this entity art became the primary space of political intervention. The 1960s were associated with the emergence of prominent Palestinian artists such as Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmoud Darwish and Suleiman Mansour (Salih & Richter-Devroe, 2014: 9; Desai, 2020).

Until the 1980s, however, most Palestinian resistance was armed and mainly orchestrated by Palestinian organizations operating outside the occupied territories (Tripp, 2013b: 117). From the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the early 1960s until the First Intifada (1987-1993), armed resistance and martyrdom were celebrated and the *fida'yi*³ was the most lionized figure of the Palestinian resistance (Kahili, 2007: 142-6).

The First Intifada, however, brought new life to the Palestinian resistance and its celebrated figures (Kahili, 2007: 142-6). During the first uprising Palestinians from all walks of life engaged in acts of civil disobedience such as strikes, demonstrations and stone throwing, which resulted in the figure of the *fida'yi* being replaced by that of the *shahid*⁴ (Kahili, 2007: 142-6). From this moment on armed resistance would be avoided and instead be replaced by “unarmed civil disobedience on a massive scale” (McDonald, 2013: 118; Ehrehreich, 2016: 83).

The disproportionate use of violence against Palestinian civilians by Israel during the First Intifada provoked a wave of criticism of the Israeli Government worldwide and stimulated the emergence and growth of “boycott Israel” campaigns and increased support for the Palestinian people. As a result, Israel began to reassess its policies in Gaza and in the West Bank. It was within this context that the Israeli Government, now led by Yitzhak

³ *Fida'ya* stands for the guerrilla fighter, the redeemer who sacrifices him/herself for the common cause (Khalili, 2007: 145).

⁴ *Shahid* is a term used to refer to the Palestinians civilians who have been killed in the conflict ([Shahid | Just Vision](#)).



Rabin, and the PLO chairman Yasser Arafat started the peace negotiations that resulted in the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 (McDonald, 2013: 131-132).

With the signing of the Peace Accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994 “the cultural scene was infused with a new energy” and a new artistic period was born. The new cultural paradigm broke with traditional Palestinian art very much focused on the themes of “nation, refugeehood and trauma” (Boullata, 2004: 72; Salih & Richter-Devroe, 2014: 9). The time was now of peace and reconciliation and so the “culture of mourning, sacrifice, and revolution” felt no longer necessary (McDonald, 2013: 133-35).

The Accords were intended to end the Israeli occupation, however “attempts to silence and erase the Palestinian identity and culture did not stop” (Tawil-Souri, 2011b: 5). Less than a decade later, the Al-Aqsa Intifada (2000-2005) erupted as Palestinians gave vent to their frustration at the “broken promises and failure of the Oslo Accords” and widely felt disenchantment with the recently established PA (Pappé, 2011: 229).

The second uprising, though initially peaceful, soon turned violent as both sides resorted to deadly force (Mason & Falk, 2016: 171). The Palestinians, however, suffered considerably more condemnation in the international media when compared to Israel which allowed the Israelis to regain support and sympathy from the international community (Ackerman, 2001: 64).

Another major outcome of the Second Intifada was the unilateral construction of the 700km Separation Wall⁵ between Israel and the West Bank in 2002 (Tripp, 2013b: 122). The Wall became a “blank canvas” for Palestinian artists and resisters. Powerless to stop its construction, Palestinians revealed their resilience and adaptability as the Wall became the primary site where *graffiti*, and other forms of protest art, are exposed (Larkin, 2014: 156).

5. Contemporary Graffiti in Palestine: a case worth studying

Graffiti has always been an important element of the Palestinian resistance movement. Palestinians employ *graffiti*, as noted by Love and Mattern (2013), as the “pervasive commodification of art and culture” for political purposes (Love & Mattern, 2013: 298). *Graffiti* has been, and still is, used by the Palestinian resistance movement as a form of political activism, through which an intentional effort to challenge the political future and community development is made (Love & Mattern, 2013: 339).

Furthermore, *graffiti* has many advantages for its creators. Firstly, the costs are low and the necessary tools (e.g. spray cans) are easily available. Secondly, by being situated outside mainstream media, it benefits from freedom of speech, and thirdly the anonymity protects the author from potential retaliation (White, 2001: 257; Rodriguez & Clair, 1999: 2).

The advantages of *graffiti* are not exhausted with the *graffiter*. As an object of study, *graffiti* has the potential to offer relevant insights into the mind of those who create it,

⁵ Israel began the construction of the Separation Wall in 2002. The “security fence” is 708 km long and annexes 9,4% of Palestinian territory of the West Bank (Larkin, 2014: 134).



but also into social issues and community concerns (Ferrel, 1995: 75; Ley & Cybriwsky, 1974: 492), Thus, *graffiti* can provide a level of understanding of a community or group that should not be underestimated (Klingman & Shalev, 2001: 405; Waldner & Dobratz, 2013: 378).

Essentially, *graffiti* allows ideas ignored by other media to enter the public discourse and offers an avenue of political expression to anonymous individuals and marginalized groups (Hanauer, 2004: 30). Within the relationships of power, *graffiti* represents a direct challenge to authority and its attempts to assert control over the public space (Waldner & Dobratz, 2013: 379).

Graffiti is what Bayat describes as “street politics”. According to the author, street politics represent the conflicts between the populace and authority that are formed and expressed in the physical and social space of the streets. The streets offer those without access to a formal political arena a stage where they can express their political ideals and concerns (Bayat, 1997: 63).

As a form of communication, *graffiti* intentionally interacts with an audience to incite civic engagement, political participation and resistance (Bruner & Kelso, 1980: 241; Rodriguez & Clair, 1999: 2). By being visible in the public space, *graffiti* is a significant tool of resistance as every passer-by is a potentially new challenger to the status quo (Rodriguez & Clair, 1999: 3).

The “street” is the place where individuals mobilize or are mobilized by others with whom they do not necessarily share an “active network”. Instead, “street mobilization” is possible due to what have been defined as “passive networks”, i.e. the unspoken acknowledgement of a shared identity between individuals that permits the creation of a web of communication between others that are unknown to the *graffiti* artist. The possibility of spontaneous group action turns the streets into an important element of any resistance effort, and it is for this reason that unpopular governments watch them so closely. Even if authorities prohibit public demonstrations and gatherings, they cannot forbid people from walking, working, driving and experiencing street life (Bayat, 1997: 64-6).

In Palestine, *graffiti* found its most notable expression as a political act during the First Intifada (1987-1993) and after the construction of the “Security Wall” by Israel in 2002 (Peteet, 1996: 139; Hanauer, 2011: 301).

As explored previously, by the time of the First Intifada a complex system of media censorship had been established which forced everyday political activity to move underground and *graffiti* to become the major means of communication and mobilization (Bishara, 2009: 5-7). During this period, the language most commonly used in *graffiti* was Arabic which suggests that the content was directed at an internal audience (Peteet, 1996: 150).

In addition to encouraging resistance, inciting action (e.g. “Monday is strike”), updating the community on the progress of the uprising and celebrating martyrdom, *graffiti* was in itself an act of civil disobedience. Deemed illegal under Israeli Military Regulations, writing on walls was a clear act of defiance and a challenge to Israeli territorial claims (Peteet, 1996: 140-6).



The signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 and the end of the First Intifada did not mean an end to the production of *graffiti*. With the creation of the PA, Palestinians were given a certain degree of self-governance and official Palestinian broadcast media, namely the radio station Voice of Palestine and Palestine TV, were established in 1994 (Bishara, 2009: 8-9). Consequently, *graffiti* stopped being such a crucial communication tool, and writing on walls was no longer as dangerous leading to *graffiti* losing some of its appeal as a way of resisting the occupation. Nonetheless, *graffiti* continued to denounce the Israeli occupation but was also focused on criticizing the PA government and expressing the general disenchantment with the Oslo Accords (Tripp, 2013b: 275-6).

The outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 led to the construction of the Separation Wall in 2002. The Wall brought a new depth to the role of *graffiti* as part of the Palestinian resistance struggle (Larkin, 2014: 135-6).

In contrast to the First Intifada, the main language now present on the Wall is English⁶, suggesting a change not only in the demographic of the artists, mostly foreign, but also that the targeted audience is now the international community (Gould, 2014: 9).

As a blank canvas for political intervention, the Separation Wall attracts many international artists who use it to express solidarity with Palestinians or to criticize Israel and its political allies. Interventions on the Wall by internationally renowned artists, such as Banksy⁷, receive much international attention and praise and have helped to generate tourist, media and public interest in the Palestinian cause⁸ (Larkin, 2014: 143-157).

Another indicator that Wall *graffiti* is meant for international consumption is the common use of internationally recognized symbols of liberation and resistance, such as Nelson Mandela, Ghandi or the Statue of Liberty in murals. If artists frame their message and manipulate symbolic elements in ways that will resonate more with the target audience (Toenjes, 2015: 57-9), then by using these internationally recognized symbols of resistance and emancipation, artists are framing the Palestinian experience not as unique to them, but rather as an integral part of the global struggle for freedom and liberation (Alim, 2020: 74-5).

Despite attracting a lot of international attention, the local community has received the work of foreign artists on the Wall with ambivalence as some consider that it not only beautifies and legitimizes the most symbolic element of the occupation, but also receives more scholarly and media attention than that created by local artists (Larkin, 2014: 144). Others have also remarked that framing the Palestinian struggle in universalized terms diminishes its message as it obscures its unique specificities and makes it harder for the Palestinian perspective to be heard and risks diluting the power of *graffiti* as tool of resistance (Gould, 2014: 13; Alim, 2020: 75). An example of this was an intervention on

⁶ In a 2011 study of the *graffiti* present on the Separation Wall, in the area surrounding the neighbourhood Abu Dis (Jerusalem) it was found that 66.7% of the *graffiti* present were in English, and that only 3.8% was in Arabic (Hanauer, 2011: 308).

⁷ Since 2005, several *graffiti* linked to Banksy can be seen in Palestine. Banksy's interventions in Palestine are not unique to the Separation Wall. They can also be found in the streets of Gaza, Bethlehem and Jerusalem (Tapies, 2016).

⁸ *Graffiti* on the Separation Wall, particularly those signed by internationally acclaimed artists, such as Banksy and JR, attract many political and conflict tourists to Palestine. The higher demand for 'conflict tourism' encouraged various non-governmental organizations and tourist companies, both Palestinian and Israeli, to organize 'Wall tours' and prompted locals to open souvenir shops and other tourist related businesses (Larkin, 2014: 143-157).



the Wall named "Face 2 Face"⁹ by the French artists JR and Marco that, despite receiving much international praise, was not as well received by the Palestinian community. Consisting of the "largest illegal photography exhibition ever", the project contained large photographs of Palestinians and Israelis that shared the same profession, next to each other, on both sides of the Separation Wall, as well as in several Palestinian and Israeli cities. The objective was to highlight the similarities between the two people and, by doing so, affirm that the dialogue between them and the achievement of peace was possible¹⁰. Yet, in an interview conducted by Larkin in 2010 of a Palestinian mechanic named Hani, the feedback about the exhibition was not as hopeful: "Of course we are similar, but we do not have the same rights or the same lives" (Hani *in* Larkin, 2014: 145).

Substantial differences exist between *graffiti* on sections of the Wall that surround popular tourist spots from that aimed at an internal audience and found in Palestinian villages or refugee camps. When directed at the domestic audience, *graffiti* is used to give visual support to the political struggle. The focus tends to be on supporting political prisoners, celebrating martyrdom and drawing attention to historically important events. Aesthetic considerations are perceived as secondary (Alim, 2020: 70; Larkin, 2014: 151-2).

Graffiti produced by Palestinian artists can offer a deeper understanding of the Palestinian perspective on the occupation, of the struggles that are unique to them and on the nature of the local resistance movement. However, far more media and scholarly attention is given to the *graffiti* on the Wall directed at the international audience (Larkin, 2014: 144).

I suggest that analysis of *graffiti* produced by local Palestinian artists outside areas of mainstream media and tourist attention is relevant as it can reveal important details about the Palestinian resistance movement today and the Palestinian's political demands and aspirations. Moreover, I argue that the interpretation of the symbolic elements used and martyrs celebrated by artists in their *graffiti* can reveal their political positions and affiliations, the type of resistance techniques they are willing to pursue and what future they envisage for Palestine (Young, 2020: 43-45).

To that end, I used social media, namely Instagram, to contact a twenty-five-year-old Palestinian *graffiti* artist named Mohamd Alraee (@mohamd_alraee), living in the Aroub Refugee Camp¹¹. I asked Mohamd if he could share some pictures of his work with me and had the opportunity to ask him some questions. I was interested in understanding how often Mohamd created *graffiti*, if he was doing it individually or as part of a group and, finally, what message he was trying to transmit. Mohamd told me that he created *graffiti* alone and on a regular basis, and further explained that:

"Most of the time it is a political message, like resistance, you know... [The message] can't be subjective in Palestine. [Resistance] is part of our daily life and reality. Other

⁹ More information about the "Face 2 Face" project is available here: <https://www.jr-art.net/projects/israel-palestine>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The Aroub refugee camp is located in the southern West Bank, between the cities of Bethlehem and Hebron. Around 10.000 live in the camp, which is characterized by high unemployment rates, overcrowding and poor living conditions: Aroub Camp | UNRWA.



times it is connected to a community matter... but it is always political, specially living in a refugee camp” (Mohamd Alraee, *in* Young, 2020: 44).

From this statement alone, it becomes apparent that, contrary to the *graffiti* present on the Wall, Mohamad is seeking to speak to the local community, to encourage resistance by his peers and to criticize authority, not only Israeli, but also Palestinian (Young, 2020: 44).

Furthermore, what is common to all Palestinian parties and political organizations is the revolutionary struggle against colonialism. There are, however, differences between them, particularly their role models and alliances which vary according to their agendas and ideologies (Khalili, 2007: 49). Moreover, another indication of different political positions is the martyrs they idolize (Khalili, 2007: 133). I suggest that the same logic can be applied to analysis of the *graffiti* created by Mohamad: the idolized martyrs, symbolic elements and signs present in his work are indicative not only of his political views and affiliations, but also of what type of resistance he expects from the Palestinian liberation movement (Young, 2020: 45).

In the pictures, Mohamad provided me with three distinct but nonetheless cohesive symbolic figures: Che Guevara, the *Fida’yi* and Basel al Aa’raj (covered with the red and white *keffiyeh*). What is cohesive in these symbols and colors is that they are frequently associated with the PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine).

The PFLP is a paramilitary and secular Palestinian political organization ideologically based on liberation/Marxist principles whose origins date back to the late 1960s. The party, as a collective, rejected the notion of “victimhood” and instead replaced it with the heroic narrative of the guerrilla fighter and defended the use of arms (Khalili, 2007: 164).

Figure 1. Mural of Che Guevara, Aroub refugee camp, 2020.



Credits: Photograph courtesy of Mohamd Alraee.



Che Guevara (Figure 1) is a very important symbol within the common perception of the PFLP. As a revolutionary figure, Che Guevara is associated with the adoption of guerrilla techniques as opposed to “conventional armies” and to the celebration of martyrdom as a core element of resistance (Khalili, 2007: 132; Che Guevara, 1961: 25-46).

Figure 2. Mural of a *fida’yi* (guerrilla fighter), Aroub refugee camp, 2020.



Credits: Photograph courtesy of Mohamd Alraee/ Bulletin N° 48 from the PFLP, 1981. Designer: Marc Rudin.¹²

In the same vein, in the PFLP narrative of armed resistance the image of the *fida’yi* was celebrated as heroic and the image of the martyr associated with the figure of the guerrilla fighter (Figure 2) (Khalili, 2007: 111).

Although the importance of this figure faded with the outbreak of the First Intifada, Mohamd still celebrates Basel al Aa’raj, the “educated martyr” (Figure 3). He explained that Aa’raj was a young political activist, highly educated, who was killed by the Israeli military in 2017. Mohamd then proceeded to explain that Aa’raj was not only vocal against Israel but also against the PA¹³, because, in his words:

“They stopped fighting against the Israelis and instead followed a neoliberal way, settling for economic freedom... [The dissatisfaction with the PA is] a sentiment shared by a lot of Palestinians but not by all of them” (Mohamd Alrae *in* Young, 2020: 47).

¹² <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/pflp-bulletin-number-48>.

¹³ <https://electronicintifada.net/content/dismantle-it-and-let-them-fall/31281>.



Figure 3. Mural of Basel al Aa'raj, Aroub refugee camp, 2020



Credits: Photograph courtesy of Mohamd Alraee.

Aa'raj was part of the new generation of young Palestinian leaders determined to "revitalize the stagnant Palestinian national movement"¹⁴ and, since his passing, became one of the best-known symbols of youth resistance in Palestine, not only as a symbol of opposition to the PA but also as the modern embodiment of the Pre-Oslo revolutionary sentiment.

Additionally, Aa'raj has been compared to Ghassan Kanafani (Figure 4), a novelist, journalist and martyr from the late 1960s¹⁵. Kanafani, killed by the Israeli military forces in 1972, was a spokesman for the PFLP and acknowledged as the "archetype of the nationalist intellectual". It was his belief that both "penmanship and fighting" should be employed in the Palestinian resistance efforts (Khalili, 2007: 133; Desai, 2020).

The image of Kanafani, his literature and revolutionary ideals are associated with a period in Palestinian history in which art was conceived as a fundamental element of the Palestinian struggle for liberation and in which resistance was seen in a collective sense, a sentiment that many considered was lost with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 (Desai, 2020).

¹⁴ [The Assassination of Basel al-Araj: How the Palestinian Authority Stamps Out Opposition - Al-Shabaka.](#)

¹⁵ [https://electronicintifada.net/content/bassel-al-araj-icon-lost-generation/31051.](https://electronicintifada.net/content/bassel-al-araj-icon-lost-generation/31051)



Figure 4. Ghassan Kanafani at his office in Beirut (1970).



Credits: Bruno Barbey.¹⁶

Like Kanafani, Aa'raj was also committed to the revolution and believed in the power of both the pen and the gun. He rejected the adoption of the post Oslo defeat as an ideology and advocated for the pre-Intifada revolutionary spirit (Desai, 2020). And, similarly to Che Guevara, he believed that the struggle should be carried out by the *fida'yi*¹⁷.

Critics have suggested that the Palestinian resistance "grew tired of itself", that *graffiti* lost its appeal as of tool of resistance and mobilization as it no longer offers messages of hope nor concrete solutions (Gould, 2014: 9). However, if we acknowledge that *graffiti* offers powerful insights into the mind and political-ideological orientations of its creator, and that on a higher level it reflects community concerns, then the *graffiti* produced by artists like Mohamd Alrae deserves great consideration. I suggest that by interpreting the murals made by Mohamd, we can determine his attitude towards the contemporary Palestinian resistance movement: Mohamd celebrates Basel al Aa'raj, who is seen today as symbolizing the struggle of the new generation. He was a strong critic of the post Oslo mindset and instead celebrated the culture and morals of the First Intifada, in which resistance was marked by collective struggle and sacrifice. He also celebrated Che Guevara, a figure that became one of the most celebrated icons of the Palestinian liberation movement from the 1960s until the eruption of the First Intifada.

Lastly, Mohamd revives the figure of the *fida'yi*, which as previously argued, lost its importance with the First Intifada. To bring back this once so important symbolic element, I believe, is to state that the pre-Intifada spirit is not lost, that the guerrilla fighter is still a relevant figure today and that the revolution continues. By the martyrs he celebrates

¹⁶ <https://www.palestineposterproject.org/poster/ghassan-kanafani-in-his-office>.

¹⁷ <https://electronicintifada.net/content/dismantle-it-and-let-them-fall/3128>.



and symbolic elements he chooses to represent it would seem fair to conclude that Mohamd is in step with the new wave of Palestinian youth that contests not only the Israeli military occupation but also the authority and legitimacy of the PA.

Conclusion

Resistance in Palestine is part of a collective effort born of an awareness of *sumud* that is deeply rooted in every Palestinian's sense of self. Simply by continuing to exist and live their lives, Palestinians are resisting the occupation and jeopardizing Israeli claims over the land. Since the beginning of the occupation, Palestinians have resorted to nonviolent means, one of which is art, to resist the constant violent onslaught against them. Palestinian art mostly produced under extreme scrutiny and censorship has been integral to the construction of the Palestinian identity and sense of togetherness and to challenging the Zionist version of history.

As a political act and a challenge to the *status quo*, Palestinian art finds its most expressive form in *graffiti*. *Graffiti* was one of the most important means of communication in the Palestinian community during the First Intifada (1987-1993), and its importance as an element of resistance continues to this day.

The construction of the Separation Wall in 2002 provided a blank canvas on which, not only Palestinians but also international artists and activists, could express opposition to the Israeli government and its international allies through murals, *graffiti* and posters. Predominately written in English and located in areas popular with tourists, these messages often frame the Palestinian experience in universal terms in the hope of bringing the Palestinian struggle into the international political arena.

To focus only in these messages, however, may lead to a deeper understanding about the Palestinian perspective on the occupation being lost. To avoid this, it is important to consider *graffiti* produced by local Palestinian artists and located outside the mainstream sites of tourist and media attention, as this analysis can offer insights into the artists political-ideological orientation but also clues to Palestinian political demands and aspirations, and relevant conclusions about the state of Palestinian resistance today.

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YEMENI WOMEN'S ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

This article looks at the topic of the role of Yemeni women in conflict resolution in Yemen, regarding the informal and formal peace processes. This study analyses scientific literature and documentation available in open sources, such as newspaper articles and interviews, along with non-governmental organizations' reports. It was also conducted some interviews with experts from different backgrounds connected to Yemen, which gives us a broader perspective of Yemeni women and their role in the conflict. It was found that women's participation in conflict resolution is an important piece that contributes to sustainable peace. Despite that, women have deep difficulties when we talk about assuming an active role in these stages and have been excluded from the negotiations in conflict resolution processes. Guided by the Security Council Resolution 1325, women's involvement in peace negotiations is one of the United Nations (UN) purposes. Even if the conflict parties in Yemen have been extremely resistant to accept them in negotiations, the UN has promoted their inclusion in formal processes, through some indirect adviser mechanisms, such as the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security, the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group, and more recently, the Bloc of Women Members of Political Parties. The patriarchal Yemeni society has limited the Yemeni women intervention in the conflict, still, they have taken part in it, by participating in many activities, like evacuating civilians and taking care of injured in areas affected by war, negotiating humanitarian access, and exchange of prisoners, which shows the dynamic and relevant position they have in conflict resolution informal processes.

Keywords

Conflict resolution, Yemen, Women, UN Security Council Resolution 1325

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YEMENI WOMEN'S ROLE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Introduction

Our world is nowadays characterized by a complex interconnection of relations, where people, nations, economies, politics, media, culture, between other fields, are linked by invisible ties. The *global village* has shortened distances and the access to information has broadened in our world and the globalization process came to stay (Castells, 2003).

The *global village* has increased conflicts' consequences in size and extent: "conflicts of the 20th/21st centuries have shown a very special ability to threaten regional and global stability and peace" (Branco et al, 2017: 28). According to the Positive Peace Academy (2020), 84% of the main political crises take place in countries with a low level of peace. Conflicts happen more frequently between the so-called weak states, which do have not the capacity to guarantee the basic functions of a state.

Armed conflicts affect all the parts involved. They cause death, massive human rights violations, like torture, disappearances, and arbitrary or illegal detentions. Historical records have shown that conflicts affect disproportionately women and children. Even though, women have been ignored in formal or political mechanisms of armed conflict resolution (McGuinness, 2006).

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was considered the world's least peaceful region, and the growing conflict in the region has been the key driver to the global deterioration in peacefulness, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace (2020). Yemen is an example of an internal conflict, that has become an international issue, also called proxy war by some observers considering the support given by the external actors or countries to the different internal parties in conflict, according to their own strategic agenda (Byman, 2018). The negotiations discussions for achieving peace in Yemen have been quite difficult and still insufficient to bring some stability and development to the country.

In 2000, the UN approved Resolution 1325, which has been one of the prime steps toward gender equality, concerning conflicts. Since then, many improvements have been achieved, but the reality is not the desirable one yet, because the participation of women in conflict resolution is still deeply low and insufficient, in many parts of the world.



Several observers and academics agreed that all population's involvement in conflict resolution, mainly concerning formal processes, is essential to reduce violence and to build a society based on positive peace and sustainability (Crespo-Sancho, 2018; McGuinness, 2006; Sandole-Staroste, 2009; Domingues, 2020). Empowering women and promoting gender equality is crucial to accelerate development and produce more equal societies, which are important elements in preventing violent conflict (Crespo-Sancho, 2018).

This study is based on a Master's dissertation conducted in the context of the International Studies Master Program, with a specialization in Middle East studies (Domingues, 2020). The main research question of this study was "Has Yemeni women's participation in formal and informal peace processes had a positive impact on conflict resolution in Yemen?". This study has the purpose of understanding how Yemeni women are involved in the peacekeeping process, namely in formal and informal processes.

Concerning the methodological aspects, it was analysed existing scientific literature and open sources, such as newspaper articles and interviews, along with nongovernmental organizations (NGO) reports and up-to-date information. It was also conducted some interviews with a range of individuals who had different experiences from Yemen conflict: a Portuguese police officer that was in a UN mission, in Hodeida; a Portuguese journalist, that had worked in Yemen; a Portuguese architect, who studied and lived in Yemen; a responsible of NGO Mwatana for Human Rights; a worker at the Embassy of Netherlands in Yemen; and a senior gender advisor in OSESGY Office.

1. Women's role in conflict resolution

The Council of Europe has revealed that there is a new idea emerging, which analyses conflict as a common event, in their own words conflict is "a simple and natural characteristic of human social systems" (Council of Europe, 2012: 54). Besides, it is not accurate to say that conflict and violence are identical concepts because violence is not present in all kinds of conflicts. Most of the time people find a way to harmonize their different ideas productively, and conflict does not turn into violence (Positive Peace Academy, 2020).

The conflict resolution field of studies arose after the Second World War. With it, concepts like negative and positive peace come to light. The concept of positive peace is wider than negative peace, which means just the absence of war. Positive peace is a concept introduced, by Johan Galtung, who defined it as a more lasting peace process, based on well-functioning government, equitable distribution of resources, free flow of information, good relations with neighbours' communities or nations, high levels of human capital, human rights acceptance, low levels of corruption, and a good business environment (Positive Peace Academy, 2020). According to the Council of Europe, "positive peace proposes that involving all parties in a negotiated solution will surely make it more sustainable" (Council of Europe, 2012: 66). Positive peace is a process of transformation where all parts of society are involved and are affected by it.

The UN has a huge background on gender issues. One of the biggest moments in history was the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, conducted in Beijing in 1995, with the



participation of 30 000 women around the world. The Beijing Declaration was quite significant in raising global awareness of gender inequalities (Porter, 2007). Another important historical moment was the adoption of Resolution 1325 in 2000, by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which highlighted the discussion about the role of women in conflict resolution. This has been the first UN formal document that expressed the discrepancy regarding consequences felt by women and the remainder of the population in war areas. Simultaneously, this document emphasised the smallness of the level of women's participation in decision-making regarding conflict prevention and resolution (Shepherd, 2015). The UN Security Council has also strengthened the idea that women's involvement is an important key for peace stability when stated that "peace was inextricably linked with equality between women and men" (Olsson & Tryggestad, 2001: 1).

Despite all the efforts and progress that have been made, in 2020, a report from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), that stands for the reduction of poverty and inequality, still focuses on the differences existing among countries, affirming that "despite remarkable progress in some areas, no country in the world – rich or poor – has achieved gender equality" (UNDP, 2020: 1).

Gender inequality is not an isolated problem of a single country. Ingrid Sandole-Staroste argues that "sustainable peace, security, and development cannot be achieved if only one gender is included in decision making processes" (Sandole-Staroste, 2009: 226). When the conflict ends, society tends not to notice women's presence: "they fail to notice women's less privileged positions, the importance of the issues women want addressed, and the contributions they make, and, if they notice, they often dismiss women's demands" (Sandole-Staroste, 2009: 227).

Mary Caprioli's study, between 1960 and 2001, showed that there is a bigger likelihood of a state to experience warfare when there are higher levels of inequality (McGuinness, 2006). Similarly, Positive Peace Academy (2020) defends that countries where gender equality exists and where the rights of women are more considered have higher probabilities to build structural bases where positive peace can proliferate, and avoid conflict or war.

Men and women have different conflict management styles. Studies have shown that women tend to use more frequently collaborative, compromising, or avoiding styles of managing the conflict, while men are more susceptible to use competing or avoiding styles in managing the conflict. According to Cassandra Shepherd (2015), the collaborative style is more useful in international conflicts than the competitive one because it is more conciliatory and easier to reach consensus between parts. According to the theories of armed conflict resolution, formal processes are constituted by the negotiations between states or political groups, whilst informal processes are actions of negotiation performed by non-governmental organizations or informal initiatives of groups or even singular citizens (McGuinness, 2006).

Women have taken part mostly in the informal peace process. According to Elisabeth Porter, "while women are active peacebuilders, their contribution often is informal, behind-the-scenes, unpaid, collaborative and unrecognized as actual peacebuilding"



(Porter, 2007: 5). Women make their influence be noticed in war and peacebuilding through informal methods.

Although the importance of formal processes, the truth is that women are almost absent from them, in fact, women are “excluded from formal peace negotiation processes and public, political decision-making” (Porter, 2007: 5). History has shown that “controlling parties have ignored or excluded women from the negotiation table, and women often encounter overt discrimination when attempting to influence armed conflict resolution” (McGuinness, 2006: 65).

Women and men feel the war effects in different ways. According to Shepherd, women and children are often victims of violent situations, like rape, sexual slavery, and other sexual violence. Sexual offenses towards women and children are used as “weapons of war in international conflicts” (Shepherd, 2015: 54).

Miranda Alison (2006, apud Porter, 2007) has revealed that not all women are victims in conflict, moreover, they can be quite aggressive and methodical combatants. Despite that, “women universally are the prime nurturers in relationships, families, and communities, they play crucial roles in peacebuilding, often in very informal, unofficial ways” (Porter, 2007: 3).

According to Anna Snyder (2009), there are two main reasons for women to be involved in peacebuilding. First, women need to change the circumstances created by the conflict that affected them. And the second reason is that “they recognize that peace agreements offer an opportunity to transform society generally and gender relations specifically. Transformation of society during conflict may provide post-conflict opportunities for transformation of gender relations” (Snyder, 2009: 48).

2. Yemeni conflict

It is not new that the Yemeni conflict is causing a deep humanitarian crisis in Yemen society. In fact, over the last years, we have been heard not only different ONG and institutional organizations draw attention to that fact – UN¹ for instance – but also the media have been sharp in doing so.

Yemen, which was ironically called in the Classical Antiquity “Arabia Felix”², was established in 1990 with the joint of North and South Yemen. Yemen is divided into three geographical regions: north, south, and eastern. The north is constituted by the Shiite population, dominated by the Houthi movement³. The south, mainly made up of the Sunni population, was a British colony from 1839 to 1967, and after that period it became an Arab communist state, until 1990. The eastern side, also known as Hadromawt, is occupied by the Hadrami population, a nomad people (Orkaby, 2017). Despite all these differences, we can see that during history sectarianism has been slight. Just recently,

¹ As we can see on their webpage, that can be accessed on <https://yemen.un.org/en/about/about-the-un> (accessed on May 10, 2021)

² Latin words for “happy Arabia” or “fertile Arabia”.

³ The Houthi movement will be described further on.



people have started paying attention to religious differences, especially because of the rise of political Islam (Baron, 2019).

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait has had a strategic meaning, so it forms a vital strategic link on the maritime trade route between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. Yemen is also linked to the major transition corridors of oil and natural gas from the Persian Gulf to Europe and the United States of America (US) through the Suez Canal and the SUMED (Arab Petroleum Pipelines Company) oil pipeline in Egypt. This strategic importance can explain regional and western countries' strategic interests in the Yemen conflict, like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US. Despite its huge potential, Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world, with high levels of poverty, malnutrition, and unemployment (International Crisis Group, March 27, 2020).

The Yemeni conflict is often presented by academics as a dual conflict between a pro-Hadi side, which represents the government forces, and a pro-Houthi side, which is considered by the international community as the rebel and/or revolutionary side (Clausen, 2018).

The Houthi movement is an Islamic political and armed movement that emerged from Saada in northern Yemen. According to Ibrahim Fraihat (2016), the Zaidi Shiite Houthi movement has appeared in the early 1980s and was founded by Hussein al-Houthi, a native man from the Houthi tribe. Since he died in 2004, the movement has been led by his brother Abdul-Malik al-Houthi (McKernan, 2018), who along with his predecessor defend the rejection of American hegemony, as one of the major aims of the movement (Fraihat, 2016). In the north of the country, where they fully control, Houthis have ruled almost all administration structures, like checkpoints, security, taxes, health, and justice (Clausen, 2018).

Between 2004 and 2010, President Ali Abdulla Saleh, who was in power since 1978, fought six wars against Houthis, and in all of them, he lost. In 2014, the Houthis took over the Yemeni capital of Sana'a. Consequently, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates immediately launched their intervention in Yemen in March 2015, on the Hadi side. According to Michael Horton (2020), the Saudi coalition's militaries who were in charge thrust on a quick victory over the Houthis, nevertheless after so many years of ongoing conflict, the Houthis have shown to be strategically astute and resilient.

The Saudi Arabia and Iran intervention on internal affairs of neighbor's countries is a quite recurrent situation. Some observers argue that is a proxy war going on between the two of them, where they are, indirectly, competing with each other, and trying to obtain some advantages, without declaring war to one another, but with some actions where prevailing forces finance different armed groups using money, weapons, intelligence, and military equipment to make war (Byman, 2018).

Conflict in Yemen is similar to other conflicts which recently took place in the MENA region: it "is not a single conflict, but is instead a mosaic of multifaceted regional, local, and international power struggles which are the legacy of recent and long-past events" (Drew, 2019: 3). This is considered to be one of the reasons why is so difficult to find out a solution to the Yemen conflict, once the interests they are fighting for are not just



internal, but regional and even international, with numerous players trying to change the political scene in their favors.

According to International Crisis Watch (2020, March 27), "this conflict has no military solution, only a diplomatic one". José Rosendo (2020)⁴ stated that these conflicts which took place for years have left profound scars in Yemeni society. In the same sense, Cate Buchanan (2020)⁵ noticed that it is extremely difficult for the UN to conduct face-to-face talks because parties have been seriously resistant in having regular conversations. Buchanan (2020) also highlights that there is not a major agreement, but many small agreements that additionally make the process unclear and unstructured. The involvement of foreign actors such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other MENA countries, which have used Yemen as a stage for their proxy war, is a relevant contributor for this internal disputation last for so long. According to Buchanan (2020) the different dynamics, the number of external actors who are involved, and foreign states turn this conflict into a complex reality.

Elcineia Castro and Verônica D'Angelo (2019) state that Yemen has been living in a logical of survival, where the conflict does not look so terrifying when compared with hunger and disease. This does not lessen the importance of this topic, but, naturally, it increases the relevance of other problems that even intensify the inequality within Yemeni people.

3. Informal women-led initiatives

Informal processes in conflict resolution are defined as initiatives or negotiations taken by nongovernmental organizations, informal groups, or single citizens, to establish positive peace in a country suffering from conflict (McGuinness, 2006). These initiatives cannot be confused with formal processes, which represent the procedures conducted by formal institutions, which participate actively in peace negotiations and the decision-making regarding conflict resolution.

Women's contribution is quite often "informal, behind-the-scenes, unpaid, collaborative and unrecognized as actual peacebuilding, and thus they consistently are excluded from formal peace negotiation processes and public, political decision-making" (Porter, 2007: 5). Although the importance of formal processes, the truth is that women are almost absent from them, in contrast, they have a huge impact on informal processes.

In the Arab Springs, women have played a leading role, and "rather than simply supporting men, women were on the frontlines of the revolutions across the MENA" (Khalid, 2015: 8). Indeed, the symbol of the Yemen uprising was a female human rights activist in local media, Tawakkol Khalid Karman. The "Mother of the Revolution", as she was called by some Yemenis, became the international public face of the Yemeni uprising. However, history has shown that, during political transitions, women are regularly kept

⁴ José Manuel Rosendo is a Portuguese journalist, who has been working in Yemen. As a result, from their work on the field, José Rosendo published a report on July 31, 2019, named "Yemen: o lado Houthi da Guerra". This report is available in https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/pais/grande-reportagem-antena-1- iemen-o-lado-houthi-da-guerra_a1163821 (accessed on May 10, 2020)

⁵ Cate Buchanan is the senior gender advisor in OESGYS.



out and tend to lose the power they achieved at the peak of a revolutionary process. Historical evidence points that their demands tend to be ignored (Al-Ali, 2012: 27).

Besides all these adversities, even in the most conservative countries, women have pushed boundaries when joined protests and made their requests. The Arab Springs is considered to be a moment of development and achievement for women.

According to Buchanan (2020), Yemeni women are responsible for many activities – in 2017 there have been reported hundreds of women-led initiatives regarding the reducing of some effects of the conflict –, intending to promote peace, like humanitarian arrangements and understandings, but not only, they also are active in trying to make visible the role of civil society. These initiatives are quite important to draw a path towards peace construction and also to strengthen the importance of women's position in society. Women are trying to make their voices to be heard and there are quite good examples of initiatives that are making a huge difference to the daily life of ordinary people, because of their proactive attitude (Domingues, 2020).

There are many examples of women's contributions through these informal methods, like Sabreen, who is an educator, civil society leader, and mediator (UN Women, 2018). In 2015, she conducted a truce agreement between her community and rebel forces which resulted in the rebels leaving her community (UN Women, 2018).

Yasmin Al-Qadhi is another notable example, she got a degree in journalism, and she was one of the first women to write articles for local newspapers during the Arab Spring. In 2015, Yasmin and her sister Entisar founded the Marib Girls Foundation, which supports women and girls' and boys' participation in peacebuilding. Some of the goals of this foundation are to combat child recruitment, to support displaced women, by coordinating with the local and international community, and to encourage women's empowerment and meaningful participation in civil society and the UN-led peace process⁶. Peter Salisbury⁷ talked to her during his journey to Yemen⁸ when she described the work of her group in training people to mediate conflicts. Salisbury also met, in his fieldwork in Sabah Al-Swaidi⁹, the representative of the Association of Mothers of Abductees. This women's group influences the release of civilians that are arbitrarily detained across Yemen.

Another activist is Radhya Al-Mutawakel, a human rights defender, and the co-founder of Mwatana Organisation For Human Rights, an independent organization working to defend and protect human rights in Yemen. This organization has been documenting human rights abuses by all parties in the conflict. She has briefed the UN Security Council on the humanitarian crisis in Yemen, becoming the first person to do this.

⁶ Information available in <https://eca.state.gov/iwocprofiles/yasmin-al-qadhi-yemen> (accessed on May 10, 2021).

⁷ Peter Salisbury is a Senior Analyst for Yemen at the International Crisis Group.

⁸ Information available in <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabianpeninsula/yemen/behind-front-lines-yemens-marib> (accessed on May 10, 2021).

⁹ Information available in <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabianpeninsula/yemen/behind-front-lines-yemens-marib> (accessed on May 10, 2021).



Safe Streets Foundation for Development¹⁰ started its work supporting and empowering women in 2009, but it was just in 2013, the initiative was officially registered. The Foundation works in the field of Gender and Development and pretends to achieve peace for women through engaging them economically, politically, and socially; moreover, they intended to assure the presence of women in decision-making platforms.

4. Yemeni women presence in formal peace processes

Although the parties in conflict have been deeply opposing to accept women inside their structures, according to Buchanan's testimony, the UN has been original in developing initiatives to include women in formal peace processes (Buchanan, 2020).

Yemen's National Dialogue Conference (NDC), a transitional process held in Sana'a, which began in 2013 and lasted up to 2014, organized by the UN and the Gulf Cooperation Council, aimed to achieve an understanding agreement. NDC was decisive for achieving some important unison to build the new Constitution, with rules like including a 30% quota for women's political participation and law to set up the age of marriage to 18 years (Gressmann, 2016).

According to Afrah Nasser (2019), "the UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Martin Griffiths has ensured women's political participation in peacebuilding processes through creative ways, to apply UN Security Council resolution 1325". One of the creative ways found out by the UN was the creation in 2015 of the Yemeni Women's Pact for Peace and Security (also referred to as Pact) as a consultative mechanism for Yemen peace negotiations. The Pact was constituted by 60 Yemeni women. In 2016, the OSESGY invited a delegation of seven Yemeni women from the Pact to Kuwait meeting led by the UN¹¹, although women were not directly involved in the negotiations¹².

In mid-2018, the Yemeni women's Technical Advisory Group (TAG) was created by the OSESGY with the support of UN Women and the Pact. The TAG was constituted by eight Yemeni women, with different backgrounds, like economics, human rights, governance, and politics. In September 2018, TAG members travelled to the Geneva Consultations on Yemen and were responsible for developing three papers regarding the economy, politics, and trust-building. In December 2018, eight TAG members were present in Stockholm for consultations with the parties. According to Nasser (2019), the "Stockholm peace talks has given these women groups better access to engaging with the two warring parties' delegations". In this meeting, only one female representative of the Yemeni government delegation was at the negotiation table: Rana Ghanem.

The OSESGY states the commitment to strengthening its efforts to promote gender inclusion in line with UN standards. Buchanan (2020) has noticed that all parties have

¹⁰ Information available in <http://www.thesafestreeets.org/p/blog-page.html> and <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/860-gender-issues-in-yemen> (accessed on May 10, 2021).

¹¹ Information available in <https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/07/534602-yem-un-envoy-urges-definitive-decisions-peace-talks-continue-kuwait> (accessed on May 10, 2021).

¹² Women, Peace and Security, available in <https://osesgy.unmissions.org/women-opeace-and-security> (accessed on May 10, 2021).



been very resistant to having women in delegations and that is the reason why the office has created this indirect mechanism.

5. Results and discussion

The Pact and the TAG are indirect inclusion mechanisms, which have become quite common in recent years considering the huge difficulties in getting significant women participation in the process, mainly in the MENA region (Domingues, 2020). According to the European Commission¹³, “while civil society and women organizations are not formally negotiating parties at this stage of the political process, including women's interest groups is critical to build credibility and legitimacy of any transition”.

Roohia Klein underlines the “second-class status of women in most societies”, where their capabilities and contributions are many times undervalued (Klein, 2012: 278). This happens in many societies in MENA region countries, where Yemen has representative figures. Milena Raposo (2020)¹⁴ refers to the low status of women in Yemen society as related to its patriarchal cultural background (Domingues, 2020).

According to Hanna Showafi¹⁵ (2020), it is very difficult for women to be at the table of peace negotiations, despite the women's determination for being part of it and participating in political issues, making their demands, sharing their needs, and find out new solutions to conflict resolution.

Catalina Crespo-Sancho (2018) argues that gender equality is needed to keep a country secure and stable, by saying that “excluding women from actively participating in society can increase the risk of instability”. Crespo-Sancho (2018) also refers that “research on women, peace, and security provides strong evidence that women's empowerment and gender equality are associated with more peaceful and stable outcomes”. The involvement of women in peacekeeping forces and the security sector increases accountability and has fewer abuses against civilians, as main consequence (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2017).

According to Carla Koppel (2017), “after decades of advocacy and few changes in practice, it is clear that the only way to achieve the crucial changes needed is to introduce incentives to promote inclusion (...) Women continue to be shut out of peace talks”. In the same sense, Buchanan (2020) argues that it is quite difficult for women to be included and, one of the reasons is because the process is still unclear and unstructured. Oxfam indicates that “negotiations to end a bloody conflict in Yemen have a far better chance of long success if women have a place at the table”.

¹³ Information retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/fpi/showcases/syrian-women-agents-change_en (accessed on May 10, 2021).

¹⁴ Milena Calvário Raposo is a Portuguese architect, who studied and lived in Yemen. She also gave an interview in 2015 to Antena 1, sharing quite similar ideas, that is available at https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/entrevistaa-milena-raposo_a799888 (accessed on May 10, 2021)

¹⁵ Hana Showafi is an employee at the Embassy of Netherlands in Yemen.



The UN, through OSESGY, is doing a huge effort to include women in negotiations to solve the conflict, even if the parties are against their participation. UN created the Pact for Peace and Security, as a consultative mechanism, the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group and, more recently, the Bloc of Women members of political parties. The efforts conducted by the UN are still growing up, and we can see that for instance looking at the fact that in December 2020 the Bloc of Women members of political parties was created to ensure women's significant participation in the political scene in Yemen and as a response to the absence of women from decision-making positions. This new group of women is constituted by representatives of six Yemeni parties: the Yemeni Socialist Party, Nasserite Party, General People's Congress, Islah, Rabita, and Justice and Construction Party.

These are indirect mechanisms created by the UN to overtake the parties' resistance in accepting women between their delegations, which allows women participation in formal processes. This shows that the UN is committed to promoting inclusion in peace negotiation talks. Sometimes the UN efforts are not clear to understand because these processes of conflict negotiation are surrounded by confidentiality and secrecy, which are needed to encourage the parties to achieve an agreement.

The involvement of Yemeni women in conflict resolution is a progressive process because, apart from gender prejudice, Yemeni culture has gender roles quite well defined, and the roots of these traditional norms are very deep (Domingues, 2020). So, the way to include women in political matters must be made step by step, and the UN must use a diplomatic effort to do so.

Conclusion

Although the Yemeni culture has its roots in a patriarchal society, where women do have not a decisive role in political matters, we can conclude with this study that Yemeni women are interested in participating and making their voices be heard in conflict resolution talks. This is visible when we look at their role during the Arab Spring, but also when listening to some testimonies of Yemeni women.

Once diverse studies point that women's participation causes a positive effect in conflict resolution, the UN has a decisive role in developing efforts to promote women's inclusion. The path has been made of small steps to integrate women in the negotiations. This is not a straightforward process, including women, in this context it is something that should be done step by step, showing respect about the Yemeni culture. Some examples of the efforts done by the UN were analyzed in this study, as the creation of the Pact for Peace and Security, as a consultative mechanism, the Yemeni Women's Technical Advisory Group and, more recently, the Bloc of Women members of political parties.

However, the women's capacity to participate in conflict resolution is not only seen in formal processes of negotiation, but also in the informal processes. Women are involved in the Yemeni conflict resolution, through many initiatives to promote peace and give their contribution to establishing peace. Women integrated into associations, NGOs, or by themselves, have been struggling to assure human rights. Women's participation has



seen some forward movement, but it is still a slow progress. Positive peace in Yemen is a progressive path, which takes time, like all transformations in the world.

What Yemen is experiencing today requires the involvement and concerted action of the international community in solving this conflict, supporting the UN in its efforts. It is important, as well, that the states, which supported the Yemen conflict, engage themselves in contributing to the reconstruction of a sustainable society, by focusing on the development of positive peace and finding solutions to create transparent and effective state structures.

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ROBOT CITIZENSHIP AND GENDER (IN)EQUALITY: THE CASE OF SOPHIA THE ROBOT IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract

On the 25th of October 2017, Sophia, the humanoid robot created by Hanson Robotics, was declared an official Saudi citizen during the Summit on Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Since Saudi Arabia is known for still holding onto strong religious as well as conservative values and for still classifying Saudi women as second-class citizens, it seems quite peculiar that the Kingdom would grant the official citizenship status to a female-looking non-human being. In other words, this specific decision has come to highlight the deeply rooted gender disparities in the Kingdom even more, especially as Saudi women face a constant battle for their recognition as official Saudi citizens and for the concession of their basic human rights. Although, on the one hand, Saudi Arabia has been trying to picture themselves as trying to make steps forward in what the Western world would consider the right direction regarding the evolution of Saudi women's rights through, for instance, the publication of more progressive reform programs such as *Vision 2030*, the Kingdom is, on the other hand, simultaneously repressing Saudi women's active resistance against the patriarchal Saudi traditions. So, while Sophia the robot was granted the official citizenship status effortlessly and very rapidly, Saudi women are actively protesting for their rights.

This article is based on an explorative approach of the existent literature as it intends to study the Saudi government's unique decision of granting Sophia the Saudi citizenship; and to prospect Saudi women activists' current struggles against the government and the *muttawas*, the Islamic religious police, in their fight for equal rights compared to Sophia's situation. Thus, the present article will briefly mention the reasons why Sophia was granted this status and demonstrate how the treatment of Saudi women activists does not comply with the progressive image Saudi Arabia is trying to portray.

Keywords

Activism, Citizenship, Human rights, Saudi Arabia, Sophia, the humanoid robot

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ROBOT CITIZENSHIP AND GENDER (IN)EQUALITY: THE CASE OF SOPHIA THE ROBOT IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Introduction

The current technological innovations in terms of Artificial Intelligence (AI) have opened up new opportunities and enabled unprecedented events. In this context, on the 25th of October 2017, Sophia, the humanoid robot, was declared an official Saudi citizen during the Summit on Future Investment Initiative in Riyadh, presenting the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia as the first country worldwide to declare a machine an official citizen (Chikhale and Gohad, 2018: 107). This announcement unleashed many ethical and social debates in the field of women's rights, as Saudi Arabia is known for still holding onto strong religious, patriarchal and conservative values (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 17; Coleman, 2004: 81).

The peculiarity of this case is founded, among other issues, on the two following concerns. On the one hand, a female-looking non-human being was granted the official Saudi citizenship very easily and effortlessly while Saudi women are not only still being classified as passive members of society and/or second-class citizens, but also actively protesting for their recognition as official Saudi citizens and for the concession of their basic human rights (Chikhale and Gohad, 2018: 107; Joseph, 2005: 151). On the other hand, although the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia wants to picture itself as attempting to make steps forward in what the Western world would consider the right direction regarding the evolution of Saudi women's rights, the Saudi government is simultaneously repressing Saudi women's active resistance against the patriarchal Saudi traditions and does not tolerate protests of any kind – not even peaceful demonstrations – in favor of Saudi women's rights. In this regard, Saudi Arabia's paradoxical decision of granting Sophia the Saudi citizenship has come to further highlight the deeply rooted gender disparities in the Kingdom (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 18-19).

The present article is based on an explorative approach to the following research question: "How can a female-looking robot get more liberties than women in Saudi Arabia?" (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 18-19). The analysis particularly focuses on Saudi women activists rather than Saudi women in general with a threefold objective. First, this article aims to study the unique decision that the Saudi government took back in 2017 regarding Sophia's citizenship status. Second, it intends to prospect Saudi women activists' current struggles against the government and the *muttawas* (the Islamic religious police) in order to explore Saudi women's role in the acquisition of their basic



rights and official citizenship status all while comparing their current situation to the ease in which Sophia obtained the official Saudi citizenship. Third, this article will analyze how the government and the local authorities deal with feminist protests with the purpose of demonstrating how the treatment of Saudi women activists does not comply with the progressive image Saudi Arabia is trying to portray.

1. Methodology

The present research is based on an explorative approach and uses a qualitative methodology, particularly a literature review on Islamic feminism, Saudi women's struggles, Saudi laws, Sophia's behavior and the robot's liberties in Saudi Arabia. In order to examine the content systematically, the research calls not only for the definition of the main concepts, namely citizenship, feminism and Islamic feminism, but also for a brief description of Sophia and the respective analysis of the above mentioned topics. In contrast to the predominantly used pronouns "she" and "her" for Sophia, the present article will be using "it" and "its". This differentiation emphasizes Sophia's being as a machine in opposition to Saudi women as human beings and facilitates the distinction between both parties (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 30).

In order to achieve the above suggested objectives, the scholarship was carefully chosen and analyzed. In this sense, the research was divided into two categories. While the first selection included the topics of Sophia's citizenship ceremony and its journey to as well as stay in Saudi Arabia, the articles on Saudi women focused on their rights as well as the evolution of their liberties. Moreover, the research was conducted in English, German, French, Spanish as well as in Portuguese, and also included English written articles from Saudi Arabia with the aim of having more diverse points of view and avoiding a purely Westernized influence on this issue. Along with the relevant scholarship, legal documents such as royal decrees and reform programs from Saudi Arabia have been taken into account for the analysis.¹ Since laws on robot citizenship have not been released yet, this aspect could unfortunately not be taken into consideration. The conducted interview with David Hanson, founder and CEO of Hanson Robotics, and Ben Goertzel, leader behind the software team that created Sophia, also represents an interesting and crucially relevant insight for projects of this scope (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 21-22).²

This ensemble of sources facilitated the identification of Sophia's rights and citizenship status in Saudi Arabia while comparing both, Saudi women and Sophia, in order to demonstrate that the machine has more liberties than Saudi women, and it also opened the door for the exploration of Saudi women's role in the acquisition of their basic rights and official citizenship status. In other words, the chosen scholarship – particularly their legal approach – enabled the analysis of Saudi women as activists fighting for equal rights and a) was thus especially helpful with the indication of any developments regarding Saudi women's rights; b) allowed a better understanding of Saudi women's current

¹ These documents include laws such as the Basic Law of Governance, the law on the Saudi Citizenship System, the Saudi Nationality Laws and the current reform program *Vision 2030*.

² The interview took place during the 10th edition of the Web Summit in Lisbon, in November of 2019.



situation; c) evidenced whether or not the Saudi government is willing to implement changes concerning Saudi women's rights.

The selection of this specific case is justified by the observed contradictions that seemingly coin the Saudi Arabian priorities and policies. In fact, Sophia's citizenship showcases a paradoxical view of the concept of citizenship and highlights gender inequality in the Kingdom as well as Saudi women's protests. While Saudi Arabia is demonstrating a strong willingness to modernize their country by means of technological investment, such as the introduction of robot citizenship and the creation of a city where robots will outnumber people³, and while women's rights have witnessed a positive evolution, the government is simultaneously shutting down Saudi women's protests in favor of gender equality (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 18; 57; 20 minutes, 2019). It is noteworthy that women's empowerment is a vital aspect for good governance as well as social and economical development. Only when a country includes this aspect of civil society into their calculations for good governance, it will be able to create a robust as well as self-sustaining social structure (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 17).

2. Definition of the main concepts

2.1. Citizenship

Citizenship refers to contract-making individuals who are bound together by a society and who defend their rights, duties as well as interests within this society. This set of rights, duties and interests – otherwise known as human rights – are inherent to all human beings without discrimination, no matter their sex, nationality, religion or any other status, and entail every type of shared right and obligations, such as social, civic, political and economic rights. However, this definition corresponds to the Western concept of an undifferentiated and homogenous citizenship. Therefore, it does not necessarily apply to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Altorki, 2000: 215; Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 22-23).

As a matter of fact, Saudi Arabia has no constitution per se. Instead, the Kingdom uses the *Shari'a* as its fundamental law and ties the notion and practice of community to kinship, which is valued over the membership to the state (Altorki, 2000: 215, 218; Joseph, 2005: 149).⁴ According to this system, Saudi women's social status is limited to the roles of mothers and wives who have to take care of their family and household and who have to be controlled by men (Doumato, 1999: 578). In other words, kinship is infiltrating the economic, political, religious as well as social domains of the Saudi society; devolving the family into the crucial identifying unit of membership to the state; transporting gendered and aged discourses as well as practices into citizenship; and

³ The megacity "Neom" was planned alongside Hanson Robotics. It is designed as an international tourism and business hub where everything will have a link to AI as well as the internet and as a city with fewer rules than the rest of Saudi Arabia. Accordingly, in Neom, women will allegedly be allowed to appear in public without wearing an abaya. It remains to be seen, however, if Neom will actually be built (Estes, 2017).

⁴ Even though the *Shari'a* does not reference the concept of citizenship, the Saudi Arabian state regulates the conditions under which one can become a Saudi citizen. In this sense, citizenship is either passed on by a) the blood criteria (being born into a traditional Saudi family where the father or both parents are Saudi citizens); b) having settled in Saudi Arabia for over 10 years, c) reaching legal age; d) marriage; or e) being fluent in Arabic and complying with the national norms of conduct (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 32).



enabling the existence of the guardianship system according to which every Saudi woman needs a guardian. This role is usually assumed by either the father or husband and entails having the power to take critical decisions on the woman's behalf. As a result, Saudi women are subjected to a system where they are dependent on men and the patriarchal structures; where their status as a family member is their qualifying factor for citizenship; and where they thereby face daily discrimination regarding the promotion of their fundamental rights (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 22, 31-33).

Overall, we can observe the masculinization of the concept of citizenship in Saudi Arabia which results in significant limitations for women's positions in society, such as mitigating their equality, being seen as lacking political personhood and being categorized as indirect or second-class citizens (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 22, 31-33). In this context, the term "patriarchal connectivity" is used to further express how the kinship system is enabled to entangle itself with the public and private spheres of life, the state and civil society as well as religion and nation. These patriarchal relations specifically subordinate Saudi women, award Saudi men with dominance as well as authority and enable the existence of the strict male guardianship law that is still upholding the Saudi social structure. Consequently, the state and the family can be a source of protection but also a source of repression for Saudi women (Joseph, 2005: 154, 158, 164; Altorki, 2000: 236; Manea, 2008: 24).

2.2. Feminism and Islamic Feminism

Feminism, on the one hand, believes in economic, social and political equality between the genders. It is a political engagement concerned with questions of power in the sense of relations of subordination, capacity, ability and opportunity to be able to control the conditions of personal existence. Moreover, it is also an ethical commitment that opposes the patriarchy or, in other words, the social construct of male supremacy and thus the domination of women by men.⁵ In other words, feminism recognizes and criticizes male supremacy and strives to change this system. As the feminist theory was born out of the movement to promote women's rights and the willingness to empower women worldwide, it fights against women's exclusion from highly valued forms of life, such as positions of power and influence; against women's confined roles of support to men, such as mothers, wives and reproductive partners; and against the silencing of women's interests on behalf of men's benefit. In this sense, feminism focuses on gender inequality through women's experiences, social roles and relations with men while identifying the patriarchy, sexism, gender equality, women's liberation and oppression, among other concerns, as their central preoccupations (Al Alhareth et al., 2015: 121; Thompson, 1994: 173-174, 176-178).

Islamic feminism, on the other hand, is one of the many dimensions that form the concept of feminism. It uses the ideology of feminism as its foundation but tries to operate within the Islamic values with the purpose of changing the stereotypical social roles tied to Islamic women. In other words, Islamic feminism suggests social benefits and the

⁵ It is noteworthy that feminism is not exclusive to women and that not all men are motivated by the mastery over women. In fact, it also seeks to empower men who fall victim to male domination and who are oppressed by male supremacy (Thompson, 1994: 173).



enhancement of opportunities for women in a culturally satisfactory and sustainable manner, and aims for the empowerment of women, social justice and gender equality all while viewing issues such as politics, dressing, religious practices and public life from an Islamic perspective (Al Alhareth et al., 2015: 122; Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 48).

2.3. Sophia, the robot

Regarding Sophia, it is an artificially intelligent humanoid robot developed by Hanson Robotics, an American company based in Hong Kong, in cooperation with SingularityNET and Alphabet, Google's parent company. Activated in April of 2015, Sophia has not only the appearance of a middle-aged woman, it also recognizes voices and faces, is able to replicate 62 different facial expressions as well as human emotions, and to articulate as it speaks by means of its electronic synthetic voice system. In fact, Sophia's creators wanted to enable the robot to maintain, on its own, an intelligent conversation with human beings on any given topic and allow the robot to accompany its dialogue with the suitable emotional expression. Thus, the most human-like feature that Sophia possesses is its ability to learn from its interaction and experiences with different interlocutors, which enables it to accustom itself with the different emotions, linguistic styles, feelings but also cultures of the people it interacts with. Sophia's emotive, communicative and linguistic abilities have even enabled it to be named the first Innovation Champion of the United Nations Development Programme. Consequently, Sophia is the first non-human being to be granted a UN title as well as an official citizenship status and is said to have marked the start of a new technological era (Retto, 2017: 3, 6-7; Pagallo, 2018: 232).

3. Case study

3.1. Saudi activists' role in the acquisition of gender equality

In the meantime, the interrelation between politics and religion in Saudi Arabia results in significant gender disparities. The national religious establishments support the oppressive decrees and laws imposed on Saudi women while the endorsement of charters against women's discrimination is often seen as a form of Western dominance and a threat to the Islamic system. Accordingly, the situation in the Petrostate is far from being in compliance with any international standards regarding women's rights even though it has ratified treaties about this matter. Through the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2000, for instance, the Kingdom is contractually and legally bound to ensure that women's rights are protected as well as being promoted on national territory (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 33; Mtango, 2004: 50-51, 63). Nonetheless, gender equality, including Saudi women's rights and citizenship status, is being undermined in the name of religion. Saudi women are continuously categorized as second-class citizens, have to endure legal as well as cultural prohibitions and struggle against the old Saudi customs, inequality, discrimination, double standards between women and men and an extension of their stereotypical roles (Van Engeland-Nourai, 2009: 392; Joseph, 2005: 151; Mtango, 2004: 51, 57).

As Islamic feminism is still not supported in Saudi Arabia and Islamic societies often see these types of concepts as an assault to their religion and a secular ideology from the



West, shifts in gender dynamics are often discarded (Al Alhareth et al., 2015: 122). This demonstrates that considerable political and legal reforms as well as overall social change are required to improve Saudi women's status, and it also solidifies the importance of Saudi women's role as activists in the acquisition of gender equality (Mtango, 2004: 51). In fact, a growing number of advocates and journalists in Saudi Arabia have been slowly pushing the social boundaries and demanding an increase of women's rights. Already back in 2007, for instance, the Committee for Women's Right to Drive started a petition encouraging the government as well as the king to re-evaluate the driving ban imposed on Saudi women (Kelly, 2009: 6). This protest continued in 2011, when the official campaign "Women2Drive" was launched by female activists in order to mobilize support against the ban (Rijal and Khoirina, 2019: 442).

Even though Saudi women were finally granted the right to drive in 2018, these types of regulations seem to only be valid in theory. In fact, when new reforms are implemented, they are usually accompanied by further restrictions and they hardly ever affect how the civil society behaves or functions. This statement can be observed in at least two different instances. In the first place, concerning Saudi women's right to drive and obtain a driving license, Saudi authorities implemented a new regulation allowing their male guardians to oppose this newly acquired right. Moreover, not only are there only a few driving schools that accept Saudi women, these schools are usually also more expensive for Saudi women than for Saudi men (Dousseki, 2019; Reuters, 2019). Secondly, alongside the restrictions to their right to drive, when a new regulation regarding women's right to travel freely without their male guardian's permission was announced, the Saudi authorities imposed, once again, additional limitations. On the one hand, the reform only allowed women over the age of 21 to travel freely, which means that women under this age limit still need their guardian's permission to do so. On the other hand, this regulation does not explicitly specify that the right to travel abroad is also included which enables male guardians to prevent their female family members to travel outside of the Saudi Arabian borders (HRW, 2019).

Generally, activism in Saudi Arabia raises backlash. Hence, some journalists prefer to refrain from meeting up with Saudi activists, while other pro-governmental news outlets mock their protests in opinion columns and even accuse these women of betrayal as well as of being a threat for Saudi Arabia's unity, security and stability (Zoeff, 2011; Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 49). However, the challenges faced by Saudi activists do not end here. In fact, several human rights organizations have already come forward and accused the Saudi regime of repressing political activism (20 minutes, 2019). This being said, one of the main impediments to their activities and to the expansion of women's rights are the restrictions imposed on civic organizations. In other words, Saudi activists are unable to organize or to simply voice their opinions and demands without fear of being persecuted (Kelly, 2009: 6). In fact, the manner in which the Saudi authorities react to and deal with women's rights activists proves how challenging it is to apply Islamic feminism in Saudi Arabia (HRW, 2019; Dousseki, 2019).

Although the Saudi authorities and the Saudi government have been initiating reforms in favor of Saudi women's rights, female Saudi activists have not had the privilege to be treated under the same standards. On the contrary and contradictorily, female Saudi political activists who have been protesting for the deployment of these same reforms,



together with the journalists that support them, have been imprisoned based on overall dubious allegations or simply because the local authorities considered their behaviors as a violation of the current Saudi law. It is relevant to highlight that these imprisonments take place even in cases of demands to abolish the guardianship system, pacific initiatives regarding the promotion of women's rights and communication with international organizations. They remain in detention until they are called to present themselves in a criminal court where they can face punishments such as travel bans or even up to 20 years in prison for their peaceful activism (HRW, 2019; Amnesty International, 2019; Dousseki, 2019). So, for instance, when in 2018 women were finally granted the right to drive, the Kingdom almost simultaneously started a repressive campaign against women's rights activists. These women were detained, had no access to lawyers and some even testified being victims of sexual harassment and torture during their arrest (Amnesty International, 2019; Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 48). These allegations were confirmed by their families and even by international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) that released a statement concerning the treatment of imprisoned Saudi women where they exposed that the Saudi authorities had allegedly subjected them to electric shocks, lashes on the thighs and sexual assault (Dousseki, 2019).

Despite the great attention Saudi women's efforts have received internationally, with international organizations, such as Amnesty International, the American Congress and several Members of the European Parliament involving themselves on several occasions to call for the release of these activists and to condemn the Saudi guardianship system, their demands were not met with success. On top of that, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, along with his supporters, denies these women any credit for the implemented changes, which once again reflects the misogyny within the Saudi system. This "caution" on their behalf can be explained by their fear of internal threats to their regime. In other words, if the Saudi government allowed their population to believe that significant changes such as these happened thanks to the continuous efforts of Saudi activists, the Saudi population would grow more self-aware and prone to revolutions demanding a constitutional monarchy, democracy and political representation which would threaten the existence of their authoritarian regime (Amnesty International, 2019; Doussek, 2019; BBC, 2019; Lorena, 2018). Hence, by granting small liberties to the Saudi society but tightening the overall control, the government makes it very clear that they do not tolerate any type of objection to their decisions (Volksstimme, 2019). This controversial behavior on behalf of the Saudi authorities shows, on the one hand, that the government suffers from the social as well as political pressure Islamists put upon it and, on the other hand, that the royal family struggles to balance their supporters' expectations on preserving the social order and Saudi women's demands for equal, more progressive rights (Van Engeland-Nourai, 2009: 392; Doumato, 1999: 582).

3.2. Sophia, the robot: citizenship process, status and liberties

The paradox of enrolling a female-looking non-human being as an official citizen in a country where women are constantly fighting for equal rights and their recognition as citizens has generated many debates regarding Sophia's status. In other words, we are facing the paradoxical case of a machine being granted the citizenship status in contrast



to another person or sentient being. Accordingly, it is necessary to explain how this concession was possible and why the robot was granted the Saudi citizenship.

When closely examining the legal aspects of Sophia's citizenship process, several contradictions to the current Saudi Arabian laws can be pointed out. In fact, a human being wanting to acquire the Saudi citizenship would have had to apply for this status; be born into a traditional Saudi family; marry a Saudi citizen; and/or possess the necessary qualifications of eligibility to obtain the Saudi citizenship, such as a permanent residence permit, having settled for over 10 years in Saudi Arabia, the legal age requirement, and/or fluency of the national language. Based on these requirements and procedures imposed by the Saudi Arabian Citizenship System and Nationality Regulations that the robot did not meet nor follow, and based on the fact that Sophia is a machine and not a gendered person, it should not have been granted the citizenship status (Atabekov and Yastrebov, 2018: 775-777).

Although the Saudi Culture and Information Ministry confirmed the citizenship status without stating the benefits the robot would enjoy along with this status, it is nevertheless possible to demonstrate that the Kingdom is opening exceptions for a machine and allowing it certain liberties while depriving humans (Saudi women) from these same liberties. So, even though Sophia is clearly a machine, if we take into consideration the gender it is supposed to represent, we can observe that the female-looking robot failed to comply with the Saudi norms of conduct that are imposed on Saudi women on a daily basis. In other words, Sophia's behavior while in the Petrostate deviates vastly from the accepted model of behavior for Saudi women. For one, although Saudi women are required by the government to wear the Islamic veil most of the time, the humanoid robot presented itself without an *abaaya* during the Summit on Future Investment Initiative. Moreover, the female-looking humanoid robot also went against the strict male guardianship requirements that are imposed on Saudi women by being in public without a male guardian. While both of these infringements on behalf of Sophia would have led Saudi women to be brought to administrative and criminal responsibility under the current Saudi legislation, the robot did not face any consequences for breaking the rules. Considering these aspects of Sophia's citizenship process, it comes to no surprise that this specific case has received extensive media coverage and that it has been widely criticized, especially by Western media outlets. In fact, Western journalists have pointed out how the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is equating a robot to human beings and how Saudi Arabia is even seemingly elevating the robot over Saudi women (Atabekov and Yastrebov, 2018: 776-777; Sini, 2017; Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 50-53).

The question that remains to be tackled in this section is why Sophia was granted the Saudi citizenship when it should actually have been refused this privilege based on the lack of fulfilled requirements. Was this ceremony a simple but highly effective publicity stunt given the massive amount of media attention that Sophia already had or was this decision rather founded on strategic reasons? On this note, David Hanson, the founder and Chief Executive Officer of Hanson Robotics, mentioned that he initially wanted to reject Sophia's Saudi citizenship due to its rightful provocative and controversial nature. However, after discussing the possible opportunities with his Chief Marketing Officer, they decided to embrace this status based on David Hanson's conviction that all potential sentient beings deserve respect as well as their corresponding rights because the ultimate



goal is the creation of sentient machines. Consequently, they made Sophia an advocate for the rights of all sentient beings and more specifically for women's rights in the Middle East. Hence, Sophia kept the Saudi citizenship first and foremost because nobody declined or revoked it.

Another reason that can be pointed out as an explanation as to why Sophia was granted the Saudi citizenship derives from a business perspective. As a matter of fact, awarding Sophia with the citizenship status can be interpreted as a way of economical diversification through robotics. Thus, by doing so, Saudi Arabia projects the image of a future driven country that is open to innovation as well as new technologies and that is capable of engaging in the modernization of its society as well as economy with the end goal of attracting foreign investment. Following this logic of economical and societal modernization, Sophia's citizenship can be tied to the willingness of establishing a more progressive agenda for their future, especially in terms of more expansive human rights. In this sense, the Saudi reform program *Vision 2030* is a good indicator that demonstrates how the government is trying to balance a progressive stance in favor of women's rights and the expectations of the conservative establishments without upsetting them or losing their support. Since the traditional and patriarchal part of the Saudi society has proven to be an obstacle regarding the implementation of progressive women's rights, the Kingdom might have resorted to granting citizenship to a humanoid female-looking robot in order to sensitize the conservative minds within their population to the idea of equal women's rights and to prepare them for future changes (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 64-65).⁶

3.3. Saudi women and Sophia: comparison

Overall, instead of being a deeply thought out process with a fixed meaning, Sophia's citizenship is random and flexible, and nobody really knows what this status entails. Accordingly, only three aspects are currently certain:

- 1) First of all, Saudi Arabia is presenting a lack of coherence between the liberties granted to a female-looking robot and the rights that Saudi women possess. Even though Saudi women's rights have slightly evolved over the last few years, Sophia still enjoys more liberties than them. In fact, when relating the proposed framework for the concept of citizenship to this case, two major differences can be pointed out.
 - ⇒ On the one hand, the framework establishes that citizens are individuals who defend their rights, duties and interests within their society. However, Saudi women are being impeded to voice their demands or communicate with international organizations, are being imprisoned based on dubious allegations as well as under inhumane conditions, and their political activism as well as peaceful protests are being repressed by the Saudi regime. By contrast, if considered as an example of a gendered person instead of a machine, although the female-looking robot's behavior deviated vastly from the accepted behavioral

⁶ Saudi officials have been arguing that the failure to end women's discrimination and the slow progression of these reforms are not due to state policy but rather to their overall conservative culture, the strict interpretations of the Islamic law by the powerful clerical establishments, and the difficulties that these factors represent in implementing measures in favor of women's rights (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 65, 69).



model, Sophia was not brought to administrative or criminal responsibility under the current Saudi legislation for its infringements against the local norms of conduct.

- ⇒ On the other hand, the framework of citizenship also refers to a set of social, civic, political and economic rights that are inherent to all human beings without discrimination. However, Saudi women are subjected to oppressive decrees and laws that categorize them as second-class citizens, impose legal and cultural prohibitions upon them, and undermine gender equality, their rights as well as their citizenship status in the name of religion. Their status is limited to the roles of mothers and wives who have to be controlled by men. Thus, they are being averted from practicing their rights and full potential as citizens. However, if again considered as an example of a gendered person, Sophia did not have to follow the same prohibitions. Instead, the robot did not have to cover itself, presented itself alone in public without a male guardian, did not need to follow any legal procedures in order to be granted the Saudi citizenship and its process was met with far more ease and speed than any human migrant worker who applied for the same status and has been living in the Kingdom their entire life (Sini, 2017).
- 2) Secondly, as the Saudi government has not yet officially stated which rights Sophia has been granted along with its citizenship, the meaning of Sophia's citizenship status will most probably fluctuate over time as the Saudi leaders and officials have the possibility of varying its meaning at any point in time.
 - 3) Finally, the incoherence of granting a machine more liberties than Saudi women can be due to two different reasons. Sophia did not face any consequences either because the decision to declare it a citizen was directly made by the appointing authorities instead of being implemented due to civilian protests; or because, despite its status, Sophia is still considered a property/machine rather than a citizen or sentient being and is thus not held to the same expectations as Saudi women. In other words, when taking the reasons why Sophia was declared an official citizen into consideration and when bearing in mind that its rights have not yet been officially established, Sophia seems to still be treated as a mere property rather than as a real citizen (Vilela Fernandes, 2020: 65-68).

Conclusion

The objectives of this article have mainly concerned the evaluation of Sophia's rights and citizenship status in Saudi Arabia; the exploration of Saudi women activists' struggles against the local authorities and their role in the acquisition of their basic rights; the comparison of Sophia and Saudi women; and the demonstration of how the local authorities deal with protests. These objectives and the subsequent information lead to an answer to the presented research question: "How can a female-looking robot get more liberties than women in Saudi Arabia?"

Although developments concerning the progression of Saudi women's rights can be observed, it takes a long time for them to be implemented, as shown with the example



of the *Women2Drive* campaign. While it evidences that the Saudi government is willing to implement changes, it also stresses how the delay in the concession of rights to Saudi women can be traced back to the very traditional and patriarchal establishments that rule the Saudi society. In fact, as mentioned before, the Saudi government is put under pressure by, on the one hand, Saudi women and their expectations for equal as well as more progressive rights, and, on the other hand, by the Islamists who expect the government to maintain the current social order as well as the guardianship system. Hence, based on the lack of coherence between Sophia's and Saudi women's freedom, it has been established that the Kingdom is making exceptions for a machine that it is not yet willing to make for humans (Saudi women).

In this context, and to reply to the research question, one of the main reasons why Sophia was granted the Saudi citizenship is linked to the Kingdom's willingness of portraying the image of a progressive and future-driven country. In other words, the Kingdom resorted to robot citizenship as one of the means to portray economical diversification and the modernization of their country. However, by providing a better understanding of Saudi women's and especially Saudi activists' current situation, the present article shows how the portrayed image contradicts their actual behavior and actions. In fact, the Petrostate still clings onto conservative social values that subject women to oppressive decrees and laws categorizing them as second-class citizens, that impose legal and cultural prohibitions upon them, and that undermine gender equality, their rights as well as their citizenship status in the name of religion. This being said, Saudi Arabia has still a lot of work ahead in order to comply with the progressive image they want to project and to completely shed their reputation as one of the most restrictive countries on women's rights.

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UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICIES: A PROMISE OF A DIGNIFIED LIFE

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Abstract

The 2015-refugee crisis fully hit Greece after years of strict austerity, challenging notions of entitlement, the role of institutions, and overall assumptions on migration. This article examines Greek asylum and migration policies and their impact on the every-day life of asylum seekers. Drawing on Foucauldian perspectives and fieldwork in Eleonas camp in Athens and Moria camp in Lesbos, it identifies the main consequences of those measures. Results show that policies are exclusionist and perpetuate irregularity and illegality. Finally, it takes the debate to a macro-level, challenging the responsibility of the European Union.

Keywords

Asylum seekers, Refugees, Governance, Power, Exclusion

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UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF EUROPEAN ASYLUM AND MIGRATION POLICIES: A PROMISE OF A DIGNIFIED LIFE

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Introduction

This article discusses the influence of Greek asylum and migration policies on the everyday life of asylum seekers and refugees coming to the European Union (EU). It aims to understand how disenfranchised individuals seeking security and safety experience policies in a context between humanitarian emergency and political frictions. The societal, political, and academic contributions teach us to acknowledge individuals' various lived realities and how existing policies reinforce control instead of freedom of movement.

Regarding the Greek context, the country first faced the 2007 global financial crisis, making it greatly affected within the EU. Then, with a total of 12 austerity packages between 2010 and 2017, Greece endured a continuous cycle of recession and high unemployment rates, leaving no one and nothing unaffected. It led to a humanitarian crisis, with historical records of homelessness, suicide, growing sickness, cuts in salaries, pension allocations, and reduced availability to public goods (Cabot, 2018).

A few years later, in 2011, the world witnessed the Arab Spring, a series of uprisings and protests against oppressive regimes and poor quality of life in the Arab World, followed by the destructive war in Syria. Overall, in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, citizens face long-standing weak governance, economic hardship, corruption, and deeply rooted religious or ethnic conflicts. Hundreds of thousands of children, women, and men have made their way towards the EU, seeking international protection. The unprecedented arrival of immigrants in 2015 challenged the EU's adequacy to respond to crises. Despite efforts to design and implement policies, the 28 countries forming the EU have implemented 28 different asylum policies, resulting in uneven burden-sharing (Felix, 2020).

Because of its geographic location, Greece represents a door to safety and security and has seen more than one million individuals crossing its borders in 2015, and so began the European 'refugee crisis'. Meanwhile, local NGOs were still dealing with their citizens' humanitarian crises on the Greek mainland, while islands such as Lesvos have seen a new wave of turmoil in their daily lives (Cabot, 2018: 18-19).

According to Campesi (2018), policies refer to a set of thoughts or action plans developed by an organization or government. They are also implemented during periods of crisis



in which decision-makers have little time to respond to specific events. Policies can represent a disruption in the daily life of individuals where peculiar measures are needed to survive (Campesi, 2018: 196-197).

Set up in 2005, the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) represents a body of EU legislation establishing minimum standards and practices for examining and determining asylum applications and managing asylum seekers and individuals recognized as refugees. In line with CEAS and founded in 2011, the institution European Asylum Support Office (EASO), aims to reinforce EU member state cooperation on asylum, improve CEAS implementation, and provide scientific and technical support to countries in need (European Commission, n.d.). Additionally, the Dublin III Regulation adopted in 2013 is an EU law defining which member state is in charge of examining an application from asylum seekers requesting international protection under the Geneva Convention. Overall, CEAS and the Dublin Regulation imply an expansion in surveillance and monitoring and external border control, directly reinforced by Frontex since 2016 (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) (European Commission, n.d.).

In March 2016, the EU-Turkey reached an agreement designed to limit the mass arrival of migrants in the EU via the Turkish territory. An important aspect was the repatriation of all migrants who had reached the EU illegally. Moreover, the EU declared its willingness to resettle Syrians living in Turkey who qualified for asylum and resettlement in the EU on a one-by-one basis. The EU promised the Turkish government six billion euros and loosened visa requirements for their citizens to travel to the EU.

The Hotspot approach was presented in the European Agenda on Migration in May 2015 but put in practice the same year as the deal complementing it. It was directly responding to migrant mobility, perceived as unmanageable and therefore ominous. This mechanism allows for the accommodation and strengthening of all relevant European agencies regarding cooperation and centralized control over external borders and asylum procedures. EASO, Frontex, Europol, and Eurojust help member states in need (Greece and Italy) and support the mechanisms for implementation and harmonization. The Hotspot approach in Greece, located on five islands (Lesvos, Samos, Kos, Chios, and Leros), shows the limited mobility imposed on individuals trapped within borders, defining everyday life by marginalization (Papada et al., 2019: 48-52).

Asylum procedures have been strongly criticized due to understaffed asylum services, leading to applications higher than registration capacities. In response, firstly, a fast-track procedure has been implemented, and secondly, interviews via Skype aimed at reducing long waiting queues. Nevertheless, the asylum process has been considered inefficient because of decisions without reasons, lack of translators/interpreters, slowness of the process, and low recognition rates (Bolani et al., 2016: 90-93).

Under the admissibility procedure, applications of Syrian nationals are given priority. If the application is considered admissible, that person can travel to the Greek mainland and have her/his application processed by the Greek asylum authority. Iraq and Afghanistan are countries with high recognition rates (when over 25% are positive decisions). For non-Syrian nationals, it is the percentage of recognition rate out of the total number of asylum decisions. Among low recognized asylum nationalities count Tunisia, Pakistan, Algeria, and Morocco. The complicated web of asylum procedures



applies arbitrary criteria (i.e., nationality and recognition rate) and cut-off dates (for example, before and after the implementation of the EU-Turkey Deal) to manage and discipline migrant mobility (Papada et al., 2019: 50).

The agreement caused problems in its implementation, as Turkey was not recognized as a safe third country by the European Commission, causing problems regarding the rule of law. Furthermore, the accord is not under the European Court of Justice jurisdiction because of its political nature, making it not legally binding for involved countries. From another point of view, the agreement was implemented to dissuade more individuals from coming (Papada et.al., 2019: 48-52).

The promised one-to-one resettlements also turned out to be lower than expected: between March 2016 and March 2021, just over 28,000 Syrian refugees were relocated from Turkey to the EU, far below the 72,000 envisaged in the agreement. To express its resentment, in the spring of 2020, the Turkish government permitted migrants to push through its territory to the Greek border, where asylum seekers were turned back, sometimes by force. In response, Greece suspended asylum applications for a month, turned away migrants who entered illegally, and deployed its military to the border. In a report, Greek officials declared Turkey as a smuggler itself. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who refused an EU offer of one billion euros in additional aid, was accused of using asylum seekers as a bargaining chip to obtain additional money, aid, and other political deals from the EU (Terry, 2021).

Presenting the most relevant European migration and asylum policies denotes their intention of tools for governance and control by creating different categories facilitating the management of asylum seekers. Zones of inequality were created involving spatial management of population mobility, guided by the need to facilitate the free movement of goods and certain people and exclude others. As a result, borders are experienced differently by different groups and individuals. This conflict between economic globalization and security preoccupation leads to inconsistent and insecure border regimes for managing mobility, built on vulnerability and bureaucratic domination (Vradis et al., 2019).

This article's contribution proposes a better understanding of how individuals with different lived realities embody policies and give rhythm to refugees' everyday lives. Furthermore, it provides a critical theoretical understanding of the existing mobility framework within the EU, the relationship between agency and freedom, and how they have reinforced marginalization, vulnerability, and exclusion instead of proposing a dignified life.

This article identifies and discusses the consequences of Greek and European asylum and migration policies on the daily life of asylum seekers. However, it does not neglect the role and livelihood of Greeks within the context of the European 'refugee crisis' but argues that it requires further detailed research. To theoretically address the topic, namely the governance of individuals, Foucault's theory about governmentality and bio-politics plays a central role in surveillance and managing mechanisms followed by the methodological framework, reflecting on the importance of research methods and ethics. Finally, results will be presented, answering the research question of this article.



1. Theory: Governing the forgotten ones

Over time, European border control has become more radical without real precedent, emphasizing the increasingly complex interplay between politics and economics, the rise of social fears, and “the obsessive deployment of surveillance technologies” (Fassin, 2011: 216).

Every power mechanism is specific to its era with the respective structure of thoughts and implementation techniques. With the beginning of modern societies, power mechanisms have taken a new way of expression, enforced by discipline based on knowledge and the production of norms and behaviours, allowing self-regulation (Foucault, 1976). In the 21st century, liberal western societies have become so preoccupied with their citizens’ well-being and health, called bio-power. It is defined as “the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy” (Foucault, 2009), that ones’ rights reinforce others’ exclusion. Framed as a productive power technology rather than repressive, it refers to the well-being and health improvement of a country’s population and includes monitoring, organizing, and controlling. This control can only be put in practice through governmentality, in other words, indicators and statistics such as birth and mortality rates.

Agamben (1998) argued that the politicization of life is becoming more dangerous as it reduces humanity to the biological life that can be kept alive or killed. Human beings can be killed without impunity because they are already set outside the legal sphere. More than being excluded, asylum seekers are abandoned by international law by normalizing the ‘state of exception’ (Agamben, 2005). The distinction with Foucault’s understanding is that he includes natural human life in the polis, while Agamben argued that it is only included when excluded.

Through her research on displacement and exile in Europe after World War II and the emergence of institutions for the “refugee” Malkki (1995) has claimed that refugee camps became framed within technologies of care and control, managing mass displacement through spatial concentration and the role of bureaucracy and administrations associated with care and control (Malkki, 1995: 498). Agier (2002) joins this argument as camps represent the combination of social conditions created by war and a place characterized by large-scale segregation where life is kept away from the regular political and social landscape. Refugee camps have seen professionalization of humanitarian assistance such as experts, scientific research programs, and academic and popular journals (Agier, 2002, 318-322). Sigona (2014) proposed ‘campzanship’ to represent the forms of membership produced in and by the camp and rejects Agamben’s State of exception as it does not represent life in the camp as a whole. Therefore, she calls to de-exceptionalise camps (Sigona, 2014) and joins Cabot (2018) in the importance to de-essentialize the category of ‘refugee’ (Cabot, 2018: 7), highlighting that in migration studies, the whole population should be investigated, in which migrants are part of it. This allows studying the connection between border crossers and a less mobile population.

The structured and organized development of international humanitarian assistance, characterized by the West’s dominant role, relates to the global governance of



disenfranchised individuals; called humanitarian governance (Barnett, 2005). The humanitarian world uses violence to settle and balance its identity and role as caring and understanding agents, described as “striking with one hand, healing with the other” (Agier, 2010: 29).

Biopolitics can examine how humanitarian organizations and practices govern certain entities and contribute to their marginalization and insecurity, shift the accountability from states to individuals, and enforce these exclusions through the intersubjective constitution of specific categories (such as irregular migrants).

In the context of humanitarian governance and Foucault’s theoretical understanding of power relations and techniques to control and govern asylum seekers and refugees are various but mainly found in bureaucracy. Over time, organizations such as the EU or the UN have developed systems, standards, knowledge, and indicators allowing constant improvement and optimization of asylum seekers’ everyday lives. This bureaucratic control is to be found in the spatial control of mobility, starting when individuals cross borders and must give all necessary information to be registered in EURODAC. Keeping on with controlling and calculating migration flows for an organized reception within facilities. Secondly, it relates to the space itself, the refugee camp, precisely calculated for a specific number of individuals.

Over time, the UN and NGOs have been focusing on optimizing everyday life in refugee camps by advocating the importance of community, which has become another way of governing. Refugee camps are usually divided by vulnerabilities or ethnicities, showing the categorization of individuals from the beginning. Involving refugees through participatory schemes raises awareness of their security management with their ethics, values, and obligations, which can only be done if they first accept their victim ‘statuses’ to receive assistance (Bulley, 2014: 12-15).

2. Methodology

2.1. Methods

Ethnographic methods allow the researcher to immerse her/himself into a community’s everyday practices and understand social phenomena. In this case, this research method is relevant when trying to understand the everyday life of asylum seekers in Greece and how asylum and migration policies are experienced.

In the frame of my Master dissertation, two phases of preliminary fieldwork have been carried out, then reformulated for this article. Firstly, six months of participant observation with the Greek non-governmental organization (NGO) Project Elea working directly inside Eleonas camp in Athens between late August 2019 and January 2020. The second phase of fieldwork occurred during February 2020 on Lesbos, specifically between Mytilini and Moria camp.

I conducted 12 semi-structured interviews, five with asylum seekers and seven with international volunteers. Templates were prepared in advance, with three sections related to the same themes: cohabitation with locals, humanitarian work and the situation in Moria, and the involvement of the Greek government and the EU. The aim



was to give people the opportunity to speak and provide time and space to raise their voices beyond research questions. Due to my limited stay on Lesbos, I decided to apply sampling, which allowed me to work with a population to represent the whole. Called 'accidental sampling' or snowball sampling, it is used when it is complicated to reach a specific community or population, in this case, asylum seekers in general or those who would feel comfortable enough conducting an interview. The only criteria for participation were the age of majority and a sufficient English level for maintaining a conversation.

Moreover, I met different volunteers with whom I built friendships, which helped me find people eligible to participate in this research. I met most of my interview partners through the convenience of sampling. This method is relatively quick (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005), which allowed me to conduct twelve interviews within ten days. I also intended to conduct interviews with locals, but I decided to distribute surveys based on ten questions due to the island's tense atmosphere and my short-time presence. It included what locals think of asylum seekers fleeing to Greece and their conditions on the island, and the involvement of the Greek government and the EU. Respondents could answer with yes, no, or neutral. A total of 12 individuals of the majority age participated; seven were living between six and 56 years on the island, and five were born there.

Overall, this paper includes qualitative and quantitative methods, which can be argued as typical for anthropological research, characterized by its interdisciplinary fields of research and subjects and includes "a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions [...]" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 3).

2.2. Research strategy

Along with secondary sources, the research strategy used was Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), aiming at identifying concepts and categories emerging from collected data and linking them later with formal theories. Although criticized by several scholars, later re-examined individually by the authors, the goal is to limit gaps between praxis and theory and allow constant reflection between empirical data and theory.

Though the survey was based on a social constructivist frame where knowledge is constructed, it is slightly opposed but still similar to Grounded Theory, in which knowledge is created through the neutrality of the researcher. Therefore, social constructionist views society as an objective and subjective reality and is fully compatible with classical grounded theory instead of the constructionist grounded theory, which takes a relativist standpoint. Nevertheless, the relevance of such research can be questioned as it produces many representations that can each claim legitimacy (Andrews, 2012).

When I arrived at Eleonas camp, I initially wanted to research gender experiences of refugee women through participant observation. Though this would have been an important contribution to gender research, I felt that my research needed a more political approach and decided to attempt to understand the daily impact of asylum and migration policies regarding camp conditions and chaotic asylum procedures. While taking notes during meetings with coordinators, having informal discussions with volunteers and residents of the camp, and later conducting fieldwork on Lesbos, concepts and certain



narratives emerged. Generally, they referred to the lack of respect for human rights, the often arrogant and uninterested attitude of national authorities towards asylum seekers, and the locals' position. Additionally, it became clear that there was an issue of unequal power relations, misrepresentation, and categorization towards and between asylum seekers, locals, and institutions managing migration coming to the EU.

The data analyzed from interviews was done based on coding through keywords or similar statements, and data from surveys were analyzed with the support of a bar diagram, giving a visual representation for a better understanding of similarities and differences.

2.3. Ethics

To avoid human rights violations, exposure to marginalization and discrimination, and endured restrictive access to their rights, I presented an informed consent document providing information about the research, ensuring that participants understood what they agreed to and had freedom of participation before each interview. If my interview partner could not read English, I started by explaining my research and ensuring that their participation would not impact their asylum procedures as some feared and, therefore, would be done under anonymity. The concept of voluntary participation might be unfamiliar to asylum seekers. That is why I highlighted at the beginning of the conversation that they could stop it at any time without justifications. Some might experience fear, as exactly those people have been fleeing from authoritarian regimes or experienced violation of human rights (Krause, 2017: 8).

On the other hand, some asylum seekers did not have a problem with their names being published, as they wanted their stories to be heard. All my interviewees could choose where the interview would occur, mainly in coffees/bars, in public spaces like squares, or at Moria canteen. To ensure a comfortable atmosphere between the interviewees and myself, and for personal interest and curiosity, I proposed to send participants my research once finished. All of them happily accepted, building trust between us and reinforcing my intentions.

While data are collected for academic research, scholars have argued whether findings should be shared with policymakers. Jacobsen and Landau (2003) proposed the concept of *dual imperative*, which attempts to "satisfy the demands of academic peers and to ensure that the knowledge and understanding work generates are used to protect refugees and influence institutions" (Jacobsen and Landau, 2003: 186). As I support Landau and Jacobsen for sharing results with policymakers, I also endorse Krause's viewpoint to share findings with participants, underlying the importance of handing over feedback to the communities and how data was used (Krause, 2017: 24-26).

2.4. Reflection of the researcher

I believe that hierarchical differences regarding asylum seekers were not an issue due to my young age, which may have played a role. Nevertheless, I felt some hierarchal difference with locals, especially on Lesbos, as I was clearly labeled as a foreigner who could afford to be a volunteer, reinforced by the fact that I did not speak Greek. During



my fieldwork on Lesbos, international volunteers were attacked several times and injured, which did not make me feel insecure walking in Mytilini's streets but just reminded me to be more cautious. However, I mainly experienced emotional challenges during my interviews, where I was confronted with the harsh reality of being an asylum seeker, reminding me daily of my privilege.

Language barriers, specifically with Greeks, impacted my limited involvement in the field, making it complicated to reach citizens for conducting interviews. During my fieldwork on Lesbos, Greek citizens refused most of my interview proposals. As I could only stay for three weeks, I had to adapt my research methods to the dynamics of the field, which were changing nearly every day (such as two days of general strikes where everything was closed, including no public transport at all). Once I realized it would be challenging to speak with locals, I decided to work on surveys. While I was printing these, I asked the copy shop owner, who was Greek and with whom I had already talked a few times, if, in his opinion, people would be open to a survey. He confirmed with enthusiasm, saying that Greeks want to show their side of the story as well. Overall, I believe that my status as a foreigner limited my research of Greek attitudes, who maybe assumed I was an international volunteer.

A second limitation though related is my time-limited presence in the camps and, therefore limited my ability to conduct in-depth fieldwork on Lesbos and has been limited to day-time ethnography. Several asylum seekers in both facilities told me that at night time, once NGOs and volunteers were gone, the atmosphere in camps was significantly different, involving more violence, aggression, and clashes between ethnic communities but also with camp authorities.

The third limitation concerns the sampling process for interviews and surveys, as participants were chosen based on their English level and age. Consequently, this research unconsciously or unintentionally contributed to silencing some people. While it is hardly possible to involve all community members, sensitivity to processes of inclusion, exclusion, and inequalities is crucial (Krause, 2017: 9). In this case, those who could not speak English or perhaps felt uncomfortable leaving their place and being in public spaces with locals did not have the opportunity to participate in the research.

Through these formal and informal conversations with asylum seekers and refugees this fieldwork gave me the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their various lived experiences from the moment they left their home country, the countries they crossed, their relationship with smugglers, later obstacles faced and assistance received when arriving in Greece and their relationship with locals. Fieldwork undoubtedly led me to better sense both facilities' day-to-day dynamics, one considered the best camp in the country and the other as the worst of all Europe. By living for six months in Athens, and three weeks in Lesbos, the relationship between asylum seekers and locals seemed to be hanging by a thread. I saw the unequal treatment of asylum seekers and refugees from whom fundamental human rights were kept away, but I also saw locals being blamed on bare accusations, as Greeks were still enduring consequences of the financial crisis leading to an internal humanitarian crisis.



3. Results

Crossing the Aegean Sea might seem like a short geographical trip but turned out to be a deadly passage. Individuals are often more than the allowed number per boat, not always given access to safety jackets, and left alone for hours in the water. Once they arrive, locals or volunteers, providing first aid assistance, instantly make them criminals, maintaining a circle of illegality and irregularity. Strict security and surveillance techniques framed as “regularity and classificatory technologies” (Rozakou, 2017: 39), adding to sometimes illegal border controls and authorities’ (in)actions represent the first consequences of asylum and migration policies, resulting in traumas, various types of violence, and cases of human trafficking (Crawley et al., 2016: 33-35). Greek coast guard authorities have also been accused of pushing asylum seekers back into Turkish water or not providing first aid assistance.

Interview partner 1 told me that he also came by boat from Turkey to Lesbos; “I came with the boat. It was so difficult. It was cold, and I was in the water for four hours.” (Interview partner 1., 17.02.2020). Interview partner 2’s statement is similar, claiming that the water is ‘too dangerous’ but that people still come (Interview partner 2., 19.02.2020).

Once individuals arrive in Reception and Identification Centers, such as Moria camp, they are fingerprinted, photographed, and all kinds of personal questions are asked based on the Dublin Regulation, making it the most relevant information in the state’s eyes (Rozakou, 2017: 37-39). They are informed about their rights, restricted from the beginning, and are forced to wait for an undefined time.

Drawing on Foucault’s modern understanding of power relations and the political entity refugee camps represent, biopolitics and governmentality measures are forcing rhythm upon the daily life of children, women, and men. Although policies have been implemented to assist individuals in need, provide a dignified life, and guarantee fundamental human rights, in practice, they look different and has been widely criticized for their ineffectiveness. Inhabitants of Eleonas and Moria camps have often reported to me about wrong or were not provided with a translator during interviews. Moreover, errors in documents, and understaffed asylum units, delay their applications without considering daily and structural discrimination and racism (Felix, 2020). Rozakou argues that coast guards, police officers, and general street bureaucrats were sustaining individuals’ irregularity by not recording everything, practicing irregular bureaucracy, creating a ‘bureaucratic limbo’ (Rozakou, 2017: 40-42).

Out of my five conversations with asylum seekers, only one received refugee status, while others faced difficulties due to chaotic and extensive asylum procedures. A participant explained that when he arrived in Lesbos on a boat carrying 52 other individuals, including his wife and two young sons, they were brought directly to Moria to be identified, registered, and informed about the camps’ rules. Some days later, he went with his family to the EASO office as they had an appointment there, yet he was mysteriously told that only he had not been registered. He felt distraught and perplexed, stating, “but how is this even possible? But they told me it is my problem, not theirs” (Interview partner 5., 25.02.2020). Because of this error, he had to wait 45 days longer to have a new appointment with EASO workers that, seemingly uninterested, blamed



him. Later, he told me that his first interview had been scheduled in 15 months, making him wait until May 2021, delaying his application even more and at a different time from his family, risking separation. Also, interview partner 2 was still waiting for his asylum interview. He arrived on the island in February 2019, and by the time of our conversation, he did not receive any interview date, and was losing hope of leaving the camp in Moria one day (Interview partner 2., 19.02.2020).

This shows how asylum procedures are mainly defined as 'waiting times' by applicants, making them periods of uncertainty and frustration. "Now, if you come, they will give you a piece of paper that tells you to wait. You wait for a long time, it can take you one year, eight months or six months. They do not care" (Interview partner 4., 22.02.2020). Although residents of Eleonas can enjoy better conditions than in Moria, some are still struggling with their asylum applications. After receiving two rejections, a young single male from Guinea, whom I met during my volunteering time in Athens, told me he had been waiting for his papers for over three years. Meanwhile, he is engaged daily in Project Elea's' activities, trying to accept his situation.

This limbo is reinforced in refugee camps, where everyday life is kept away from political and social dynamics, characterized by large-scale segregation. As in most camps, Eleonas and Moria's inhabitants have expressed strong feelings of uselessness and powerlessness due to insufficient occupations (Agier, 2002, Felix, 2020). Regarding the locations themselves, they are both defined by containers and tents (often self-made) in which individuals live organized by various categories such as vulnerabilities or ethnicities. Moria has received international attention for its shameful conditions, where NGO's and several other organizations accused the EU-Turkey deal of rapid and chaotic escalation. Daily life is characterized by ethnic violence between residents and local authorities, gender-based violence, illness, stealing, long waiting queues for distribution, sanitary access, no access to electricity, which leads to tenseness, agitation, and frustration. Moreover, inhabitants must face a high amount of garbage production, which the municipality of Mytilini does not adequately manage (Felix, 2020).

An interview partner told me that if he had known about the conditions in Moria camp, he would never have come to Greece, stating, "Moria is more dangerous than Afghanistan!" (Interview partner 2., 19.02.2020). He described Moria as 'hell'. Like another participant, they believe that animals in Greece are treated better than refugees. Safety and security is a recurrent issue, as, during my fieldwork in Eleonas and Moria, I have heard several times from residents about stealing problems in the camps, usually leading to ethnic quarrels. In addition, due to the lousy electricity distribution, individuals must use their phone lamps to go to the bathroom at night, where small groups are using this moment of exposure to steal phones and wallets. From five asylum seekers, two have been robbed at night.

I asked survey respondents if they thought the situation in Moria would get worse, and eleven out of twelve answered positively. Then, I asked if they think that asylum seekers receive enough help in general (including NGO's, the Greek State, and/or the EU). Seven individuals are convinced that they receive enough help, but ten respondents still understand why asylum seekers protest. I also asked international volunteers what would happen in their opinion in the following months. Some have mentioned probable more



extensive demonstrations and the coming of fascist members, calling it a 'point-of-no-return'.

During my stay of three weeks, three demonstrations were organized by locals and volunteers, protesting the opening of a new reception center and refugees' daily conditions. One night, the island saw about 200 officers of the Unit of Reinstatement of Order disembarking at Mytilini's port. This was then followed by two days of a general strike (Smith, 2020). Eventually, life almost went back to normal when Erdoğan opened Turkey's borders only a few days later, spreading fake rumours that the EU would open its borders for a limited time. Instantly, in the middle of the night, hundreds made their way to the port, hoping to reach the mainland and other European countries. Erdoğan's political move was to obtain more financial support for refugees and his military operations in northeast Syria. Greek borders were immediately closed, asylum applications were suspended for one month (although illegally), and chaos was felt again in Mytilini. The same week, One Happy Family's community day center was victim of an arson attack, denying individuals attending daily activities. This was followed by a devastating fire inside Moria's camp in September 2020, leaving half of its inhabitants without shelter. The situation was already precarious and deteriorated when COVID-19 made its entrance in Moria camp, emphasizing one more time the failure of existing policies promising a dignified life (Felix, 2020).

Conclusion

These are just a few examples of how the daily lives of asylum seekers in Greece look like, specifically in Eleonas and Moria camps. Effects of asylum and migration policies are harsh, exclusionist, and perpetuate constant categorization, marginalization, irregularity and illegality. Along with chaotic and ineffective asylum procedures, individuals are trapped in camps with unbelievable conditions leading to frustration. The increasing mental health distress and sickness developed reflects the nature of the European 'refugee crisis', and decision-makers seem to leave the situation immoral on purpose, hoping to avoid more people coming. Bringing this debate to a global level, there is an apparent uneven burden-sharing between European member states, and when solidarity or even interest is shown, then only towards border control reinforcement and not relocation schemes.

This article profoundly challenges the Dublin Regulation, which should be designed to equal participation of asylum seekers, refugees, and locals of regions or countries hosting a high number of immigrants. Moreover, bureaucracy needs to be taken more seriously, as its neglect causes the denial of human rights to others. Finally, more research should be dedicated to understanding Greeks' positions and feelings and the effects of asylum and migration policies on their daily lives. Accordingly, this article promotes the importance of participative policies for increasing diversity and equality among social actors and groups in decision-making.



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