



**Full Length Research Article**

**WOMEN AS TRANSFORMING AGENCY IN DEVELOPMENT: TOWARDS PEACE-MAKING AND JUSTICE-BUILDING IN THE ISRAELI/ PALESTINIAN CONFLICT SITUATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE OPT (OCCUPIED PALESTINIAN TERRITORY)**

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**ABSTRACT**

In conflict situations, women are much more disadvantaged compared to men. Women tend to be the most vulnerable victims of various forms of violence. But focusing only on women as victims of conflicts ignores the fact that women play significant roles during and after the conflicts, and reinforces existing traditional gender values and practices that women are only “passive” and “subservient” in peace and politics. This has negative consequences in overlooking women’s potential as key actors in peace-building processes and activities. It therefore is of utmost importance to take cognisance of the fact that women themselves are powerful actors in conflict situations.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The spiral of violent conflict in the Israeli/Palestinian context since 1948 caused thousands of people to be killed and hundreds of thousands of Palestinian women and men to be displaced (today over 4.3 million are living within the boundaries of historic Palestine; half of those, 45,5% are refugees in their own land. In the OPT of 1967 a number of approximately 4 million listed by UNRAW in 2003. Of these, over 32% live in the 59 refugee camps scattered across the Middle East (cf. ATG, 2005, 49-53, cf. Ateek, 172)). Many people lost their families as well as livelihoods and properties, and continue to suffer from especially living in refugee camps, the occupied areas and the “Wall” together with a variety of resultant identity and dehumanizing crises (cf. Kairos Palestine). As the subject of this article is women, the focus will be primarily on women in Occupied Palestine, as well as in Jerusalem. In conflict situations, women are much more disadvantaged compared to men. Women tend to be the most vulnerable victims of various forms of violence, from domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, to sexual torture

and other types of sexual violence. They also suffer disproportionately from displacement and deprivation. But focusing only on women as victims of conflicts ignores the fact that women play significant roles during and after the conflicts, and reinforces existing traditional gender values and practices that women are only “passive” and “subservient” in peace and politics. This has negative consequences in overlooking women’s potential as key actors in peace-building processes and activities. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to take cognisance of the fact that women themselves are powerful actors in conflict situations. During and after violent conflict, women play a variety of different roles to ensure their and their families’ survival. Women take on many different roles as community organizers, helping to distribute food, clothes, medical care and other basic needs to the disadvantaged people and as powerful advocates for peace. Some women become combatants to protect their family and community from the “enemy”. However, women’s experiences and roles in peace-building and their contributions are often unacknowledged, undervalued and ignored. They are underrepresented and barely included in the formal political peace processes. Much of the analysis tends to focus on women as victims of conflicts rather than as actors. Aware of the different impacts of conflict on women (and men) and of

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the importance of the roles and experiences of women as actors as well as victims this essay is an attempt to understand and describe women's role not only as victims but also in the promotion, strengthening and participation in the peace-making/ building processes and the achievement of sustainable peace and development in Israel and Palestine. From a Theological perspective this essay falls within the ambit of Theology and Development debate, which encompasses issues like Christian Humanism, the Imago Dei doctrine and human dignity, partnership of gender in God's creation (God and humans and humans with one another), the new creation in Christ in relation to the identity and the calling of humankind according to the values of the Kingdom of God.

### **Problem Statement**

If women (and children) are the most vulnerable components within the Israeli/Palestinian conflict (with regard to Palestinian occupation), how are women assisted in empowering themselves and how can women be enabled in context as a transforming agency for peace and justice building?

### **Conceptualization**

- Transforming agency
- Gender
- Peace-making and peace-building

### **Transforming agency**

I view a transforming agency as a mechanism to organize social interactions, coordinate, and specialize into artefacts (items, like social capital, economic, physical etc.) and tools. However, these tools are not only for "coordination" but for achieving something, for some outcome (goal/function), for a collective activity and objective. In particular I will suggest that these artefacts specify (predict and prescribe) the mental contents of the participants, both in terms of beliefs and acceptances and in terms of motives and plans. In contrast with prevailing behaviouristic views of scripts and roles, I will argue that when we play a role we wear a "mind." Wearing such a public mind turns out to be necessary for collective action, which has as its purpose the changing of society for the good of human life and livelihoods. The verb, "transform" means to "alter", to "make over" or to "change shape." A transforming agency would then acquire the power (ability) to bring about change. It is a catalyst for change. The adjective "transforming" indicates an (on-going) process. Thus this agency is committed to its task and/or objectives which it has set for itself in the face of the conditions that are experienced as negative and not conducive to human existence. The transforming agency would not only bring change but also values to the context of change. From a theological perspective transformation would mean changing human beings and their environment around to God's way and purpose. This approach in Theology is ethical and normative. One can speak of operating with and according to Kingdom values. Within this approach, any system, structure or action is motivated and guided by God's principles and norms. These values include amongst others, Truth, Justice, Equity, Human Dignity and Self-worth, Peace, Reciprocity, Cultural Fit, Ecological Soundness and Space, Spiritual Transformation,

Gender Sensitivity, Endogeny (cultivating inner strength and expertise from within the marginalized or context).

### **Gender**

Defining gender in a way that solves the paradoxes of "difference" Connel (2011:11) the author of "Gender" defines gender as,"... the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes." "Gender like other social structures, is multi-dimensional." It comprises identity, work, power, sexuality – all these at once. Gender establishes itself in patterns, which may differ from one cultural context to another. Gender arrangements, which are reproduced socially by the power of structures to shape individual action, are in fact always changing. This is illustrated by human practices that create new situations and as structures develop crisis tendencies.

### **Peace-making and Peace-building**

Since the end of the Cold War (1948-1989), states and international organizations have repeatedly engaged in peacekeeping, peace-building and peace-making to help solve international and intra-national problems (Grant Dawson, 2004).

Peacekeeping, like the other conflict resolution instruments is hard to define and may be intended by different users to mean different things. Peacekeeping is used to encompass a wide range of missions that often include *peace-building* and the diplomatic peace-keeping components. But in essence, the main function of peacekeeping is to facilitate the transition from a state of conflict to a state of peace; this has earned it the appellation "a halfway house between peace and war." Peacekeeping rests on three principles that are political through and through. It requires that peacekeepers: maintain the consent of the host state (s) and immediate parties to the dispute; act impartially; and behave in a non-violent and non-threatening manner. These principles also influence peace-building and peace-making.

### **Peace-building**

In contrast with peacekeeping, "post-conflict peace-building" (as it was originally known) is a new concept of which the UN first took note in 1992 (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1996, p. 469). There are two basic types of peace-building: it aims either to reinforce preventative diplomacy (remedying the root causes of conflict such as environmental degradation, underdevelopment and threats to the human security of individuals) or to buttress diplomatic *peace-making* (by institutionalizing peace after conflict). Peace-building consists of activities that, during the Cold war, were considered the exclusive purview of states. It can involve democratic institution building, the design and monitoring of elections, training of security institutions (the police and military), and reconciliation and human rights initiatives. Peace-building is linked to peacekeeping and must observe the same principles in order to be successful. Since the late 1980s military peacekeepers and a growing number of civilian peace-builders have been deployed inside states to try to maintain order, help implement agreements, and building peace. Peacekeepers and

peace-builders are inseparable partners in complex operations. Key to peace-building is if an operation can maintain the consent of the disputants.

### **Peace-making as the art of diplomacy**

Peace-making refers to political mediation, which requires principles other than peace enforcement (peacekeeping by military muscle to compel disputants to stop fighting (armistice). This is because peace-making often precedes or occurs in parallel with peacekeeping, and like peacekeeping, requires the consent of disputants. It involves negotiations that aim to avoid conflict or to bring combatants or opposing factions to the peace table. Trained people, with skill in mediation and negotiation and the willingness to commit to conflicts full-time for extended periods, is a great requirement. It requires, due to the impact of conflict, multifunctional peace operations in order to address the conflict holistically. The challenge is to identify the people who are well-placed to lead discussions of peace operations and interventions and help mobilize political will, because the public's courage and demands to "do something" are frequently channelled through them. These people once identified, may need special training to equip them for the task. They will definitely need supporting structures and coordination. They need to understand that it is a risky and life threatening business. A measure of uncertainty continues to surround the definition of the terms "peacekeeping," "peace-building" and "peace-making," because many people prefer to use "peacekeeping" to describe operations that often include the other two activities. But having said that, peace-building is generally understood as being efforts that seek to forge lasting peace, and (diplomatic) peace-making can be said to involve negotiated attempts to avoid or end conflict. This will be the manner in which these two concepts will be used in this essay.

### **Palestinian women and their vulnerability within the Palestinian/Israeli conflict situation**

As this article is about the gender impacts of conflict and the role of women in peace-making and justice and peace-building in the Israeli/Palestinian context, we are in particular concerned with Zaru's statement (2008: 109) that "... much of the (enduring, transforming and resisting) work of women is still invisible, especially in the eye of the media..." when it comes to the struggle. In the national liberation movement, in the church and in society women's work has not been considered equal to men's work. The women of Palestine are the ones who hold their families and the community together, while their husbands, brothers, and sons are in prison, deported, wounded, or killed, or when they have migrated for economic or political reasons (cf. Zaru, 2008, p. 109). Palestinian women find themselves struggling on two fronts, viz., while working for liberation on the national front they have to work at the same time for liberation as women on the societal front. They have to struggle to free themselves from hierarchy and from the male-dominated structures of their society (Zaru, 2008 p.110). However, men are no longer exclusively perceived as the primary income earner, as women and children are also generating income for the family due to poverty and a lack of men's mobility - the gender division of labour has changed. Women's role in the community has increased as well as their role in decision-making at the family and community levels. This has brought an increase in

women's self-esteem and confidence but also an increasing work burden. Although women's political participation is still limited, it seems to be increasing, especially in the village political arena. Some women have become leaders in the villages, neighbourhoods and members of village councils, in part as a result of their peace activism and humanitarian work (cf. Interviews, August 2012). The assessment according to papers delivered and interviews (cf. Zaru, Bernstein, Cedar, Khoury, Khaddra Saneh of the Sidreh Women Cooperative in Beer Sheva) also makes it clear that women are not merely passive victims, but also are important agents and actors in peace building processes. Women are playing an increasingly important role in peace-building and bridging the communities in Israel and Palestine. However, these roles are mostly 'invisible' as women have generally been overlooked and marginalized in the context of the formal peace-building processes in both regions. Women's organizations and networks, especially in the West bank and Jerusalem have gradually increased. Although relatively new and few in terms of numbers, these organizations have engaged in activities ranging from promoting women's rights, advocacy and the economic empowerment of women to community organizing and helping people meet their basic needs. As young established organizations and networks, they face several challenges in realising their potential contribution to peace.

This article is aimed specifically at analysing and examining issues on the information gathered from books, speakers in the symposium situation and visits according to the program for the course (cf. STI, International Course 2012: course outline).

### **The impact of conflict on women at individual, household and community levels from a gender perspective.**

Without specifically analysing the history and causes of the conflict since the beginning of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territory, it needs to be mentioned that "...the continuous issuance of Israeli military orders that conditions movement of the Palestinian citizens between the West Bank and Gaza Strip with obtaining permits and pre-coordination, (is)... in itself difficult if not impossible (Study of Palestine women, 2010)." From a human rights perspective this impacts on the right to citizenship and residency in their own country. Breaching this right threatens the individual's future in all life aspects such as residency, housing, work and others. To what degree would deprivation of citizenship and its implications impact household integrity and coherence in the way that it threatens marital and family life? It is therefore of great interest to know how these Israeli measures impact residency and family unification as they relate to obtaining residency permit, birth certificates, IDs, freedom of movement and access to health and education services. In addition, of special importance is the impact of deprivation of these rights on violence against women, which in turn will threaten human security of the Palestinian citizens. According to the study this context of conflict brings forth challenges related to

### **Freedom of movement**

Two challenges are mentioned, viz., challenges in access to service and in obtaining services. As far as women are concerned their movement was increasingly limited to the internal circles or compulsory movement outside the town of residence within the strategy of using alternative documents or expired passports. Women's movement outside their houses is

usually linked with obtaining health services for them self or one of the household members. Access to services was not the only challenge confronting the household's members. Obtaining the service in itself was a huge obstacle for them due to the lack of residency documents (IDs) through which they obtain other services. Moreover, to obtain health services, women endure a journey of burdens, tortures, psychological sufferings, risks in addition to deprivation in case these households seek to obtain services whether they were governmental, international or provided by UNRWA. In other cases, health services were obtained by crooked ways, which embarrassed households and sometimes subjected them to legal liabilities with organizations providing medical services.

### **Life and living challenges**

First, Societal interference and oppression: Women of traditional patriarchal types of households undergo several challenges but societal challenges have special and different impacts on the life and future of women. In a certain respect, the husband's family interfere in the wife's life due to the absence of the husband. Such pressure influences the husband so as to marry another woman. Affirming on the socially prevailing patriarchal relation and its impact on these women, other women confirm that their parents were a part of the crises through their intervention in the details of their lives. Often, parents justify their intervention as a kind of concern toward their married daughters who live away from their husbands due to the residency problem. The situation increases women's insecure feelings from their surroundings. Oppression inflicted by husbands' families on women who do not have official documents, especially if the wives are foreigners, increases and negatively affects their relations with their husbands. Second, Deprivation of rights: Most often lack of official documents deprives women of their economic and social rights although deprivation of the official documents is caused by the Israeli occupation measures. Another women adds that this reality formed and obstacle to their political participation.

### **Challenges related to family internal and societal relations**

First, Lack of trust, conflict and relations forewarning of family collapse. The study conveyed the fact that within the surveyed families conflict took on many forms, which caused many problems and difficulties in women's lives and in many cases forewarned family collapse. Women admit to tension and indifference in their marital life. Some said that they are nervous and sensitive because of the situation which impacts negatively on their relationship with their husbands. Wives bear a large part of their husbands' tragedies, which is sometimes due to husbands' carelessness or indifference regarding their wives' residence problem or lack of the husbands' solidarity with their wives, who suffer from alienation away from their families. Second, Alienation is a daily phenomenon experienced by wives. Many studies indicate a diversity of challenges associated with social integration in case of migration or moving to another place. Isolation is considered one of the most important challenges related to migration and moving to another place. This is what happened with women, whether Palestinian or foreigners who married in the Palestinian Territory. Some of the surveyed women consider that their being away from their families was

a source of inferiority and weakness in their relations with their husbands. They live in a community without any support. It became also apparent that for some it is even never easy to cope with the new environment despite the safe social conditions surrounding them. Third, Parents draw the future of their children from their life's perspective. The state of alienation experienced by women makes women draw the picture of their children's future. Based on their reality, these women provide advice to their daughters and sons. Not only that, but they affirm that they will never allow them to follow the same track as a result of their suffering.

### **Diverse psychological reflections on all family members of which the victims are the weakest**

Lack of communication among household members resulted in a number of reflections and psychological pressures burst out when these members went through certain social attitudes in which they feel pain due to their living conditions. Alienation, isolation, frustration, nervousness and tension have their own implications in the form of violence within the household. The victims of this violence are the children – “the weakest loop” in the household. A woman admitted to resorting to violence with her children, because she felt isolated and alienated. Another woman reported that her little son is the victim of her nervousness. In another case a woman reported that through her father's violence due to anxiety and tension, her brother was driven from the house.

### **Women as transforming agency in peace and justice – building in context**

Coping mechanisms used by women – including an examination of gender needs in response to the impact of conflict and unstable situations in their life:

A very special program in Bethlehem is the Sumoud House initiative<sup>1</sup>. Sumoud stands for Courage in Arabic. In this Sumoud Story House women come together to share and publish their stories and in that way strengthen one another. Through the method of telling and listening, opportunity is given for women to share their stories. And in that way stories are collected of women's experiences of oppression and occupation. They make use of the RRCA method of Reading, Reflecting, Communicating and Acting. Music, and especially choir-singing, has also become a special means of encouraging and expressing themselves as women. Special Liturgies have been designed with the Wall and OPT in mind to lament and protest the conditions the people live under. The women learn to speak English and study the Koran, the Bible and Torah. They do not speak about Religious and dogmatic differences.

Women's roles and experiences of conflict and Women's organizations and networks. (focusing on the roles and experiences of women as agents of peace, community leaders and victims of conflict and unstable situation; the institutions— both formal and informal—including their activities, strategies, capacities, problems and needs with regard to peace-building activities): We came to know through the lectures, several women's and other movements in which women are actively participating, such as Sabeel, Women in

<sup>1</sup> Seminar excursions and interviews

Peace-building (WIPNET), Coalition of Women for Peace (comprising of Palestinian and Jewish women), the Palestine Lesbian Organization, The Civil Disobedience Group and Women in Black (both Jewish Women groups).

### **The Sabeel's Women's Program**

Two outstanding Christian Arab Palestinian women are Cedar Duaybis of Jerusalem and Viollet Khoury who lives in Nazareth. We met during the seminar through lectures and field visits. Both are outstanding advocates for the program of Sabeel. Sabeel in Arabic stands for sharing – sharing the land and for the right of Palestinians to justly inhabit 22% of historic Palestine. Another key for Sabeel's existence is the reading of the Bible with Palestinian eyes. Sabeel also has a strong women's program which serves as transforming agency (The Sabeel's Women's Program, cf. Sabeel 2012). In the face of the increasingly difficult situation, there is an ever-growing need for women throughout the region to join together to face the challenges of everyday life. Concern for future generations is a powerful motivator for involvement. Through education, partnership and mutual support, women can have a great impact on society. Through the Women's Program, Sabeel encourages networks of women, fosters inclusivity, broadens knowledge of existing support resources, and educates women on their spiritual history and their responsibility as Christian women.

### **The Women's Program Activities**

- Together We Build: Day-long networking conferences focusing on the value of Palestinian women, and their rights and involvement in decision-making in their homeland. (West Bank & Jerusalem).
- Joint Field-Trips: Day trips bring together Palestinian and Israeli Arab women for spiritual reflection, visits to local organizations, and discussion of contemporary topics, as well as actions to bring harmonization in different communities.
- Women in Ministry: Forums for local women to hear the experiences of women who have played active lay-leadership roles in the church and of international women theologians and ordained ministers. These forums help widen one's approach and understanding of belonging to a global community.

Both Cedar and Viollet strive within Sabeel to help Palestinian Christians to remain loyal to their faith despite the context of oppression and dehumanization; to work for justice, peace and reconciliation. Both these women, 75 and 80 years of age respectively, have suffered tremendous personal hardships and lost under the Israeli occupation of Palestine. However, both these women without hatred and bitterness are outstanding leaders in their communities and active campaigners and advocates for justice and peace without compromise. Both stem from first generation followers of Jesus Christ. Theologically they are proponents of Palestinian Liberation Theology by which they oppose the occupation.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Information obtained in interviews with them while on an exposure trip and in a seminar situation

### **Kairos Palestine**

Cedar is also one of the founders of Kairos Palestine by which Palestinians find a way to hold on and draw on their faith, while striving for liberation so that all Palestinians can live with dignity and freedom within their own state (cf. Cedar lecture; Kairos Palestine).

### **The ICCI**

On the other hand, we came to know Sarah Bernstein who shared with us her experience as a Jewish woman within the ICCI (Women in Peace-building in Israel and Palestine).<sup>3</sup> This woman, qualified as a lawyer and mediator, works in the field of Religious Dialogue. Her personal passion is to work with women in order to re-humanize the other. She believes in Networking and Equivalency-building, Balance, Connecting and building Relationships.<sup>4</sup> The aim of ICCI is to build the capacity of women to enhance their roles in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction; to increase the number of trained women practitioners in peace-building as trainers, researchers, mediators and advocates. The women belonging to ICCI strive through community mobilizing to empower women at the grass-root level to amplify their voices on issues of peace and human security. What is more, they mainstream gender perspectives into peace-building and conflict prevention frameworks.

### **FICR (Friends meeting Quakers)**

In Ramallah we met Jean Zaru with the friends meeting Quakers. Jean Zaru was born in Ramallah, Palestine, in 1940 eight years before the Palestinian diaspora. Her life has been devoted to dialogue and nonviolent social change. As a Palestinian woman living under military occupation and at the same time finding herself in a traditional culture, her life has been nothing less than an active engagement in the struggle for liberation – liberation for Palestine, for women, and for all peoples. She has done this through work in her own community, as well as regionally and internationally. We met her according to our program on 22 Feb at the Center in Ramallah in her capacity as the presiding clerk of the Ramallah Friends Meeting in Palestine. In this position she aims at contributing to the building of a culture of peace and nonviolence in Palestine. Through the Center she with other women continue to struggle for human rights and women's rights and continue to work in interfaith dialogue with other persons of faith (cf. Zaru, 2008)

### **WI'AM (Palestinian Conflict Resolution Center) also has a women's department**

This department provides women with civil and vocational training as well as counselling. The department understands that women living in patriarchal society often feel the brunt impact of being occupational women. The department expresses the hope to transform society so that all women feel safe, empowered and can participate in the decision making process (cf. Wi' am website and pamphlet).

<sup>3</sup> Swedish Institute Lecture

<sup>4</sup> Bernstein lecture, Swedish Institute program 2012

**Potential program interventions that can be implemented to improve the conditions of women (and men), including how to strengthen women's roles and participation in formal and informal peace-building processes and activities**

Six key strategic areas have been identified based on lectures by women and authors that address current priority needs that will help women peace activists and their organizations as transforming agency. These six strategic areas are: (i) women's economic empowerment, (ii) women's participation in the formal peace processes, (iii) women's capacity building, (iv) Gender-awareness raising, (v) women's human rights and violence against women, and (vi) gender disaggregated. In relation to these areas, the Study (2010) provide guidelines for interventions on several levels, which is well suited for transforming agencies of women movements in the Palestine /Israeli conflict within oPT:

**Information level**

Women's agencies can update database of persons without family unification. They can conduct social survey of individuals without family unification and their households to identify their problems and seek to solve them. Women can conduct studies on persons without family unification, particularly women.

**Rights and legal level**

Women's agencies can continue to coordinate with competent parties in Israel to obtain family unification for individuals and families suffering from the problem. Women's agencies can put pressure on (agitate) Israel to recognize the right of Palestinians, women and men, to family unification of husband, wife or children.

**Awareness level**

Women's agencies can implement legal awareness campaigns targeting Palestinian citizens on their civil rights and family unification procedures. Raise awareness of Palestinian citizens having problems related to residency and family unification on the adopted legal mechanism and how to deal with lawyers, especially Israeli lawyers.

**International level regarding laws, human rights, networking, building social cohesion**

Coordinate (networking) with international, official and civil organizations to pose the problems of the Palestinian people in oPT and in Israel and to work with them with respect of Human Rights, humanitarian and international law.

**Programmatic level**

Work towards obtaining the necessary documents required for Palestinians to practice their political and election rights. Ensure inclusion of social assistance and health insurance for any Palestinian citizen or foreigner married to a Palestinian resident in Palestinian Territory within the same adopted criteria and regulating laws. Set up intervention policies and programs (health, educational, social, psychological, etc.) and

implement them through organizations working in Palestine and Israel to empower Palestinians to consolidate their position in the land. Facilitate granting households suffering from residency problems loans to start small enterprises in their places of residence to avoid risks of being uprooted.

**Institutional/coordination level**

Women's agencies could form official units to provide free legal assistance for households suffering from occupational problems. Efforts could be coordinated among organizations working in the field of human rights by forming legal units to provide legal assistance to citizens and to coordinate between civil society organizations and Palestinian Authority organizations to reach all problem cases relating to human rights and gender abuses.

**The Challenge of Peace- and justice-building and Peace-making for Women transforming agency**

Women's agency as peace-makers and peace and justice-builders is a vibrant movement in Palestine with strong women leaders and organisations who serve as excellent examples for world gender and conflict resolution campaigners, proponents and mediators. However, as with all humanitarian efforts and transforming processes changing circumstances pose continuous and constant challenges to motivation, vision, organisation and institution-building, agency, strategy, resilience and commitment. In this situation of acting as transforming agency, it requires that peacemakers maintain the consent of the immediate parties to the dispute; act impartially; and behave in a non-violent and non-threatening manner. It is hereby argued that awareness of the principles upon which peace-making rests, is not enough to guarantee success. A difficult conflict environment can cause an engagement to fail. Care needs to be exercised to ensure that external support for political institution building does not worsen the prospects for peace. It must be ensured that democratic peace-building expertise is culturally appropriate to the post-conflict situation. Peace-building strategies need to be sensitive to local needs and cultural attitudes and avoid imposing an external model. To be sustainable, peace-building must be rooted in the country where the conflict raged and be built on the participation of people from the setting.

Peace-making and justice-building require a sustained commitment. It is based on the forging of relationships and trust that need to be maintained for extended periods. This could involve high cost when addressing humanitarian crises or conflicts for anyone involved in conflict resolutions of this nature. The cost involved should not lower the bar in terms of seeking to foster democratic and representative institutions; rather, patience and a willingness to extend the bar out over time are required. The aim with peace-making is to guarantee peace and to break the stop-start cycle of stability-collapse. The shape and context of (diplomatic) peace-making initiative largely depend on unpredictable political events. However, timing is critical and this requires an intimate understanding of the conflict to anticipate the best moment for third-party diplomacy. From a Christian Theological understanding of agency in peace-making and justice –building the approach call for the wounded healer disposition and a kenotic embodiment of justice with conviction and commitment (cf.

Philip. 2:5-8). Aligned to these principles and contextual challenges I am sure, given their objectives and commitment, the women's movements of Palestine will continue to serve as transforming agencies through peace-making and justice-building. I want to conclude with a quotation from Jean Zaru (2008 pp.105, 108-109) to illustrate how testing such a commitment in context is: "On this journey, struggling to transform our society and ourselves, we often experience fatigue and we may become burned-out unless we are sustained by a commitment and a spirituality that is deeper than the ethics of revolution alone. The act of recovering our source, the realization that we are created in the image of God is, for women, a redemptive act. It is to reclaim our lost wholeness and our sense of self-worth..." ...As Palestinians and as women our struggle to achieve the ideals of justice, equality and freedom continue today..." For this just cause and calling, the women as transforming agency in the OPT need to be sustained and empowered to remain committed to the process of their agency for a just transformation.

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