



Student Publications

2020-01-15

Women, Wars, and Nations: How Conflict Can Change the Norms of Nationalism

Rebecca Russavage
rebecca.russavage@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studentpub>

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Russavage, Rebecca, "Women, Wars, and Nations: How Conflict Can Change the Norms of Nationalism" (2020). *Student Publications*. 285.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/studentpub/285>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Publications by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Honors Thesis

WOMEN, WARS, AND NATIONS:
HOW CONFLICT CAN CHANGE THE NORMS OF NATIONALISM

by
Rebecca Anne Russavage

Submitted to Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of graduation requirements
for University Honors

Political Science Department
Brigham Young University
December 2019

Advisor: Dr. Chad Nelson

Honors Coordinator: Dr. Daniel Nielson

ABSTRACT

WOMEN, WARS, AND NATIONS: HOW CONFLICT CAN CHANGE THE NORMS OF NATIONALISM

Rebecca Anne Russavage

Political Science Department

Bachelor of Arts

This thesis examines the impact of conflict on female participation in nationalism. Given that nationalism is an inherently gendered concept, it is assumed that conflict will provide both motivation and opportunity for women to challenge the norms of their society and be active participants in the nationalist conversation. This hypothesis is examined through the lens of passive, active, and rejective nationalism. Each represents a different level of engagement and challenge to the social norms in question. While each context is different, the evidence shows that while conflict does provide motivation to engage in conflict, the necessary opportunities for women to actively pursue that involvement are curtailed by the adherence to traditional gender expectations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis would certainly not exist without the help and generous assistance of many people. My adviser, Dr. Nelson, was essential to the process and his insight can be seen in every portion of this paper, from sentence structure to theory. The rest of my committee, Dr. Gubler and Dr. Nielson, also provided invaluable insight that allowed my ideas to end far better than they began. The Honors Department at BYU also was heroic in their willingness to work with crazy schedules and a flux of necessities throughout the few years I have been in the thesis process. Naturally, my friends have also been patient in listening to me expound on the various iterations these ideas went through, so gratitude goes to them and the community of the Global Politics Lab for indulging me. My family, especially my sister Emily and my mother Sandy, have been pillars of support through this writing process and my life. Finally, gratitude must also go to George Lucas for his filmmaking genius and the hours of Youtube fodder which it generated, as study breaks are an indispensable part of the writing process.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title	i
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
I. Introduction.....	1
II. Nationalism as a Gendered Narrative.....	2
III. Nationalism, Conflict, and Women.....	5
IV. Women Enacting Nationalism.....	7
V. Examples from Israel and Palestine.....	10
a. Passive Nationalism.....	11
ii. Motherhood.....	12
iii. Supporting Nationalist Groups.....	14
b. Active Nationalism.....	17
ii. Politics.....	17
iii. Military Engagement.....	20
c. Rejection of Nationalism.....	22
VI. Conclusion.....	24
VII. Reference.....	26

INTRODUCTION

“One hears the most penetrating things from the women. The men are more afraid of imprisonment and intimidation. It is the women who march at the head of the demonstrations, it is the women who shout, who scream out the bitterness in their hearts before the television cameras.”

-David Grossman, in reference to Palestinian activists in Israel

What is the role of women in nationalist narratives? Nationalism has acted as a strong motivator for many groups to take action, but women have historically been excluded from the nationalist conversation except in exceptional circumstances. These exceptional circumstances certainly include instances of conflict between nations, and they carry important ramifications. Stories from women in conflict areas imply that conflict breaks down the barriers that restrict female nationalism, meaning that more women want to engage in the nationalist conversation as a result of conflict. However, their stories also demonstrate a continued presence of structural barriers that continue to limit their involvement despite their motivations.

This paper will describe nationalism as a gendered narrative, then present a theory of change in female nationalist motivation and engagement that happens as a result of the conflict. Examples from Israel and Palestine show that women are willing to participate in conflict once it is presented as a nationalist cause, but various social barriers limit their actual engagement. These limitations suggest a division of their participation into three types of engagement: passive, active, and rejective. Each type represents a different level of disruption to social norms, and their participation is most common in the least disruptive, or passive, methods of involvement. Their experiences highlight the gendered nature of nationalism and the impact conflict has on the gendered narrative.

NATIONALISM AS A GENDERED NARRATIVE

Nationalism as a concept is highly gendered. This means that the narratives about the nation and loyalty to it were created largely by men and, as a result, situate men and women in separate roles because of their gender. George Mosse draws a direct connection between nationalism and masculinity: “nationalism had a special affinity for male society and together with the concept of respectability legitimized the dominance of men over women” (Mosse 67). The significance of male society should be emphasized here--nationalism was developed in conversations between men. As that happened, men gained the “respectability” of an imagined community behind them. Women were a part of that story, but they were not the authors. For Mosse, this created a power imbalance of which the fulcrum was gender.

Benedict Anderson indirectly highlights this process when he describes the formation of the sovereign imagined community that is a nation. His book *Imagined Communities* set out to describe how nations coalesce. Two major processes that he emphasizes as factors in nation creation are print capitalism and vernacular language (Anderson 52). Historic literacy rates show quite clearly that printed words were both written and consumed largely by men--female education was not prioritized for most of history, and women’s literacy has lagged behind men’s until very recently (Roser and Ortiz-Ospina 2019). This means that for much of the past the growing national identity driven by print capitalism was largely limited to men. While women are much more likely to speak their local language than read it, Anderson mentions vernaculars as a nationalist mechanism because it was used in the administration of local governments. The dethronement of Latin as the default “language of power” in favor of local languages helped legitimize the vernaculars that were being popularized in print (Anderson 55). For

much of history, women did not participate in the economic process, much less local government (Ortiz-Ospina, Tzvetkova and Roser 2018). As such, women were unlikely to even meet individuals who were part of the imagined but not immediate community-- which is when Anderson's claims that a vernacular helps nationalist ideas form, linguistically and otherwise. Thus, Anderson's description of nationalism is implicitly gendered, and significant because that gendered aspect is not noted. It describes nationalism as universal when it is happening only in male spaces. As Mosse described, there is a power imbalance when powerful narratives (like nationalism) are written only by one segment of the population.

That power imbalance drew nationalist lines between the public and private spheres along strictly gendered lines. Cynthia Enloe comments that "nationalism has typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation, and masculinized hope" (Enloe 106). In her book, she shows the way these concepts (centered on defense of an offended identity) conceptualize women in symbolic roles. In this male-written narrative, women were to be protected alongside their homes and their land. In a way, the home women cared for was the nation. It was the idea that motivated and moved men, but women were not there to act alongside them--they were held up as the sacred nation itself, not its participants (Mayer 2, Herzog 61). This equation of women with the nation creates an interesting dissonance: while men claim prerogatives of nation and nation-building, the nation (or home) is built on the daily work of women (Mayer 2). This separation between male and female spheres becomes even more distinct when institutionalized. Several authors have described the various processes of nations-- political processes especially--as barriers between the genders: "state power, citizenship,

nationalism, revolution, political violence, dictatorship and democracy are all best understood as masculine projects, involving masculine institutions, masculine processes and masculine activities” (Nagel 243, Sasson-Levy 440). These masculine (and public) processes are removed from the female (private) sphere, and as they are institutionalized and formalized female exclusion is also institutionalized and formalized. This institutionalized exclusion is quite clear in the history of nationalism, where female participation in the formal institutions of national government has been quite limited. For example, female participation in national discourse as citizens, voters, and actors is extremely new (Mittal 2019). The low rates of female participation highlight their absence from the male, public, nationalist sphere. In sum: men have traditionally been the actors in the public sphere that define a nation. Women and the homes they care for are the objects of the nationalist narrative written by men. These processes describe the act of living and fighting *for* a nation as male, while living *within* the nation as female. Conflict creates an opportunity to break this norm, and motivates women to participate in a nationalist conversation that was heretofore outside their experience. This increase in motivation happens because of the relationship between conflict and nationalism. However, the formalization of female exclusion means their participation is mostly limited to actions that fit existing female roles or act outside the institution entirely.

NATIONALISM, CONFLICT, AND WOMEN

Conflict and nationalism share a reciprocal relationship: nationalism can motivate conflict, and conflict reinforces nationalism. The definition of a nation provided by Anderson (and mentioned above) describes a nation as an imagined community both limited and sovereign (Anderson 6). If a conflict does not exist, this simply means that

groups govern themselves without interfering with others. However, when conflict arises then limited, sovereign nations become exclusive, dominant nations very quickly (Massad 467). That exclusivity means that nationalism is implicitly a zero-sum game--the empowerment of one nation must always come at the cost of another (Mayer 1). This then becomes a need to privilege the beliefs of one group over the others (Zaretsky). Put simply, nations in conflict vilify their enemies as a way to justify getting rid of them. Nationalism provides the narrative behind that process. However, Russell Hardin argued that while “norms of difference and exclusion” rooted in nationalism may lead to the production of ingroups and outgroups, this difference is not enough to provoke violence. Rather, this difference of interest escalates into violence due to fear and a desire for preemptive action (Hardin 30). While he provides a much more granular look at the process of nationalism transitioning into violence, the underlying narrative still facilitates the eventual conflict. Of course, it should be noted that nationalism does not always lead to conflict--on the contrary, different ethnic groups coordinate constantly (Laitin 11). However, in situations where a nationalist narrative exists, it can be leveraged to legitimate a conflict, and in these cases it reinforces the conflict much as the conflict reinforces nationalism.

Conflict elevates nationalism by making it a sacred narrative instead of a simple fact. That process of vilifying the enemy means that the nation becomes the hero, or a sacred thing to protect. Anderson compares the nation to the family and its “disinterested love and solidarity.” This disinterested love justifies the nation’s “[request] for sacrifices” (Anderson 144). As members of the nation make those sacrifices, they venerate the nation as a way to reassure themselves that the sacrifice was worthwhile. Perceived

consensus is key for this nationalist justification--when the entire imagined community is united against an enemy, individuals are willing to act differently on behalf of the community (Baker and O'Neal 661). Conflict and the "other" it provides are simple mechanisms for creating consensus and the justification it provides. This means that the pre-conflict norms (including gendered ones) may change.

This means that conflict allows women to participate in the authoring of nationalism through direct participation. Without conflict, the norms of the male/public/nationalist sphere would shift much more slowly. However, conflict creates a nationalist narrative that requires sacrifices--even ones that challenge gendered norms (Herzog 346). For this to occur, the community of the nation must be united in agreeing that they are in exceptional circumstances (such as conflict). This exceptionalism permits what would not otherwise be done, and with that permission women have the opportunity to engage more fully. In this context, women have the opportunity to articulate views and adopt strategies that are distinctly different from the previously constructed imagery of their womanhood and the roles assigned to them by their national movement (Abdulhadi 649). Taking that opportunity becomes acceptable because women are not acting for personal gain but with the goal of helping the selfless, disinterested nation in a time of need. This action is predicated on the sacred nationalism connected to the conflict. All of this should mean that conflict motivates women to take action and engage nationalism in ways they did not do without the presence of conflict.

A disclaimer needs to be made: it is entirely possible, even likely, that women may engage in nationalism in other circumstances--people are agents that are not controlled by their circumstances. The point being made here is that conflict makes it

easier, even expected, for women to help their community come out on top. This means nationalism becomes an important motivator for their actions. This is one model among many explanations, and evidence in favor of this model is only found in the stories people tell themselves. As that is difficult to measure, flaws will exist in the research presented below. Nevertheless, the evidence found in support of this model suggests it is worth exploring.

WOMEN ENACTING NATIONALISM

Women are an intersectional and diverse swath of society. However, they tend to be absent from the larger conversations their societies have about nationalism. This happens for two reasons: they are focused on their work on the private sphere (whether willingly or as a result of social norms), and do not have a role to fill in the public institution of the nation. The theory this paper will test is that conflict affects their separation from nationalism in two ways: conflict motivates women to take nationalist action, and it creates windows of opportunity for women to do things that were traditionally not permissible behavior. To test the extent of these possible changes, we will look at female engagement at three levels: passive, active, and rejective.

In the first category, women participate but do so in passive roles. This means that they do participate in nationalist activities, but they are doing so in very traditionally female ways. They are doing what they would do in the traditional narrative, but as part of the nationalist process. They support others, they do womanly things like feeding group, organizing supplies, and otherwise acting as a resource to, rather than an author of, the nationalist conversation. This has important implications for our theory of change in conflict: women may participate passively because it is easiest for them, or because they

are kept from more active roles. Because passive nationalism does not entail a challenge to gendered norms, it is perhaps the clearest indication of whether or not conflict leads to an increase in motivation. Whether conflict creates a change in social structures is less relevant because female participation occupies the same social niche as non-nationalist behavior, except in a different context. Given the relative ease of this type of involvement, the evidence should demonstrate why women took this role and their motivation in doing so. In this paper, we look at examples that describe passive nationalism as raising children, supporting male family members in nationalist organizations, or taking on roles under the direction of male leaders. Each type of participation fits the feminine norm, and as such it does not present an active role in determining the course of the nation. Assessing the extent of passive nationalism should tell us whether conflict creates motivation for female nationalism.

The second category is active nationalism. Here, women take on what would normally be male roles and are fully active in determining and shaping the course of the nation, often within politics or the military. This is especially relevant to the second part of our theory: whether conflict creates opportunities as well as motivation for women to take an active role in nationalism. For active nationalism to be common among women, a significant cultural shift would have to occur that would permit women to participate in male roles. Conflict can change social norms, so it is possible that those changes will extend to allowing women to break with tradition and participate in the male activities of military and political engagement. The analysis here is twofold: whether women wanted to participate, and if they were able to. To examine our theory, we will assess the prevalence of active nationalism and the experiences of women who took this route.

Women who pursued and were accepted in these roles would reinforce our theory: that motivation and opportunities arise in times of conflict. If this does not hold true, then it is possible that the motivation, the opportunity, or both are missing.

The third category is unlike the first two--here, women take the opportunity provided by the exceptional circumstance of conflict to reject nationalism altogether. The scholarship above pointed out that nationalism *and its institutions* are written around gender roles. If this is true, then it is natural to think that women engaging in nationalism may do so in a unique way--that is, one that is outside the existing norms of what "nationalism" has traditionally meant. Measuring involvement outside an institution or group can be difficult, but the unique stories examined here present some possibilities. Given the ties between nationalism and conflict already described, one way to reject nationalism is advocating for peace. In the conflict we explore, there is an impressive dialogue also advocating for an end to the conflict. If our theory about women and conflict holds true, then women should play significant roles in these groups, and their involvement should stem as a result of the conflict itself. This would show that conflict motivates and provides opportunities for engagement, but that the gendered aspect of nationalism will induce women to deny rather than participate in the existing structure of the nation.

While women may enact nationalism in a variety of ways, the three types described above are intended to capture the choices women are presented with when they consider the possibility of engaging with nationalism. Essentially, they can maintain the gender norms, challenge the gender norms, or start a new conversation entirely. Exploring the stories (or lack thereof) of women who have made that choice in conflict

scenarios should demonstrate the effects of conflict on female nationalism. In theory, conflict should provide both the motivation and the opportunity for women to take these routes. Their accounts will demonstrate the extent to which conflict made them want to get involved in the nationalist cause, and whether it created opportunities for them to do so actively. Given that passive nationalism is most accessible and presents the smallest challenge to existing norms, it should be the most common form of female nationalism. This would imply that conflict creates motivation but does not provide opportunities, while a strong representation of active nationalism would tell us that both motivation and opportunities arise. A prevalence of rejective nationalism would mean that conflict provides motivation and opportunities, but not as part of the mainstream system.

EXAMPLES FROM ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Conflict and nationalism are endemic to the modern history of both Israel and Palestine. Both have histories largely defined by a national identity. While it is difficult to pinpoint the formation of a national consciousness in time, nationalist sentiment and coordination within both Israeli and Palestinian communities has become well-established over the course of the past century. The formation of the state of Israel is a convenient indicator of the strength of Israeli nationalism, in response to which the Palestinian people coalesced to contest the loss of their land. Whether or not Palestine existed as an imagined community prior to this is hard to say--any attempt to date the formation of a national consciousness will be subject to an imperfect historical record (Connor 92). Regardless of this, nationalist sentiment of both communities became robust and highly organized in the twentieth century. This comparatively recent formation and the conflict associated with it has created a high degree of international interest in both

Israel and Palestine. As a result, the academic conversation about nationalism, with and without the involvement of women, provides many accounts and analyses which can inform our discussion of how conflict influences female nationalism. Some of their stories are found below.

Passive Nationalism

Passive ways of enacting nationalism situate women in their traditional roles: as mothers and supporters of male projects. The transition that happens as a result of conflict is less about the activities and more about the context and narratives surrounding their actions. Even referring to the nation as the motivation or central figure would be a shift. Seeing women enact passive nationalism through motherhood would mean their family transitioned from a private to a public endeavour--they were raising children with the perspective of a nation at war. As such, the family is a resource for future soldiers and contributing members of society, creating a change in narrative without a change in action. Enacting passive nationalism through a supporting role represents a change in context. Women would perform many of the same activities at home (cooking, cleaning, caring for others), but they would be doing it as the support staff for nationalist groups. In both of these actions the primary change from conflict would be the motivation. The evidence below shows examples of these two routes, and the narratives and stories surrounding each type of action will show the extent of conflict's influence on the women taking part in these roles.

Motherhood

Conflict causes national dialogues and women themselves tie motherhood to the idea of carrying on national identity and producing new contributors to the nation. In

Israel, this has been a common narrative since the days of the kibbutz. The emphasis on ties to the land and rewriting history after the horrors of World War II meant Israeli society envisioned the new Jewish man as a powerful symbol of vitality, strength, and physical prowess, and women on the kibbutz struggled to create an equivalent new Jewish woman (Shavit 34). Motherhood became that image of a new Jewish woman when nongendered divisions of work created problems on some of the kibbutzim (Fogiel-Bijaoui). This new Israeli woman was to have “proud, rooted, and ‘normal’ children,” for this was her role as a reproducer of the Israeli state (Yuval-Davis 101). Legislation passed soon after the formation of Israel reinforced this: women are viewed first as mothers and wives rather than as citizens (Berkovitch 605). David Ben-Gurion during his time as prime minister took the duties of a loyal Jewish woman from implied to explicit--he claimed that “a Jewish woman who does not bring at least four children into the world is defrauding the Jewish mission” (Sharoni 34). The prevalence of national dialogue about this rather than female voices emphasize the passivity of this approach--while women participate in it, it is written for them, not by them (Stoler-Liss 105). However, modern Jewish women continue this narrative today: interviews with them describe their motivation for having children as “deeply political and historical” in ways that require the support and replenishment of the Jewish state (Haelyon 178). The tie between national loyalty and the responsibility of motherhood was made very clear.

The Palestinian narrative is very similar--it is essential to have children who will grow up to serve as soldiers for the Palestinian cause. Here again, national leaders made very public statements about the female duty to the nation. Dr. Fathi Arafat, brother of Yasser Arafat, was interviewed at a training camp for women in 1980s Beirut and said

that “our women have a very important job in the Palestinian struggle -- they are commando producers!” (Dugas). Whether they are active soldiers or simply part of a growing population, children are referred to as a way to strengthen the nation in its conflict. More recent scholarship cataloguing life for Palestinian women in refugee camps and elsewhere has shown the continued prevalence of this nationally crafted narrative among the women themselves. One interviewer asked about the lack of contraceptives available in the camps, and the reply was that they “need mothers to produce as many children as possible for the revolution” (Rubenberg 220). Similarly, one Arab woman within Israel, upon discovering she was going to have a son, proudly claimed her child as “another baby for the [Jewish] state to contend with” (Kanaaneh 1). May Sayegh, a head of the Palestinian Women’s Union and a member of the PNC, made the tie between family and nationalism very clear: “I assure you there won't be a Palestinian baby born three centuries from now that will forget to struggle for Palestine!” (Dugas). The women within the Palestinian community clearly see motherhood as an act of nationalism.

These women and the nationalist narratives that surround them have drawn clear connections between nationalism and motherhood. Conflict provides a shift in narrative that moves women from mothers to nationalist participants. Women see a need for their actions, and the nation becomes the reason they do their part in daily life. However, it is clear that these narratives have no room for women to act outside of traditional roles-- rather, they have additional reason to focus on having and caring for children to the exclusion of other paths. Conflict created motivation for women to participate in their assigned nationalist role, but it did not create opportunities for women to change that role.

Supporting Nationalist Groups

Supporting roles within nationalist groups provide a more nuanced view of passive nationalism. Women would be working with men as they changed the course of the nation--in some cases, they would attempt to do more than support. However, we generally do not see them leading these organizations. For instance, Israeli women were able to take part in the normally male sphere of political groups during conflict, although their role was tied to their responsibility to family care and usually happened in supporting roles. When describing female involvement in Israeli groups during the 1967 war, one scholar pointed out that “women who organized [political gatherings] ...invoked prevailing notions of femininity such as care and unconditional support for their men to justify their intervention in the political debate” (Sharoni 99). This means that instead of operating as independent agents, they are still caretakers who attempt to assist their family (Herzog 30). This perception of female activism as a testament to their dedication to family and home had roots as early as Irgun--an underground Jewish armed organization that predated the British White Paper legitimizing an Israeli state in Palestine. There, women were involved in both extensive propaganda work and providing medical assistance to the fighters (Lapidot). These roles fit very well with the perceptions of acceptable work for women at the time, including secretarial positions and nursing.

Outside of Irgun, women who attempted to work in more active, male roles, were told to “knit woolen hats and bake cakes for the men at the front” (Sharoni 97). They were also assigned to act as hostesses in convalescent homes--to “serve coffee, talk to patients, play backgammon. We were to raise morale, be a reminder of normalcy. All that was required of us was our womanhood” (Sharoni 100). Here, Israeli women were actively choosing to participate in nationalist activities and thereby exhibiting an increase

in motivation created by the conflict, but there were still few opportunities for them to actually drive that conversation.

Palestinian women also participated in supporting the nationalist process as a result of the threat their families faced during the conflict. However, most of the accounts of their involvement showcased it as “an extension of traditional gender roles...visiting families and attending funeral of martyrs, sheltering shabab, treating the wounded, providing alternative education when schools were closed, establishing kindergartens, planting victory gardens, knitting sweaters for prisoners, demonstrating for prisoners’ release, and standing up to soldiers in the street to protect their sons” (Rubenberg 218). Their involvement was tied directly to their desire to protect their families from the stress of conflict. As they saw their male relatives being detained, attacked, or killed, women were drawn “into political activity, like standing outside meeting places to warn of the approach of army agents, or organizing small, but vocal, demonstrations outside jails” (Sayigh and Peteet 112). This helped in organizing resistance, but it was still a supporting role. Much as the Israeli women did, they would take part in the resistance in traditionally gendered ways, as one woman describes: “I participated a great deal in the intifada. I made petrol bombs, I sewed flags and other banned materials, and I constantly participated in marches and demonstrations” (Rubenberg 215). She saw herself as a participant in the intifada, which she certainly was. However, the work she described was often behind-the-scenes work or involved participation in a male-led demonstration. This, along with the rest of passive nationalism, seems to indicate an increase in motivation due to the presence of conflict. However, few opportunities arose as a result that would

allow women to actually change the existing social structure and actively participate in creating the national future.

For the women who support nationalism in traditionally gendered ways, engagement in nationalist activities motivated by the conflict and the threat it poses to their families. Their participation is also rooted in their homemaking role--they will comfort and support the process, but are less often seen leading the groups and determining outcomes. Their part is ancillary to the central action. In this way, conflict does continue to motivate women. However, structural change that facilitates a greater decision-making role is absent despite the conflict. Given some of the commentary around motherhood by the national institutions, conflict actually creates further limitations on women's ability to take active roles outside the home. Supporting nationalism may also reinforce the existing gender roles rather than create opportunities for changing them. Passive nationalism, while common, seems more likely to reinforce women's passive role in society than work to gradually change it.

Active Nationalism

While conflict had limited effects with passive nationalism, active nationalism and the women who pursue may find different results. Conflict places stresses on communities, among which is the fact that many men will have to serve in the military. As the iconic Rosie the Riveter campaign showed in WWII era United States culture, this means women can step into those roles and change social norms. This and other changes wrought by conflict should create opportunities for women to engage in traditionally male spheres such as politics and the military. This represents a fairly significant shift from prior social patterns, because women would then act as (some of) the decision

makers about national issues. Naturally, this shift may come with some inherent barriers and difficulties for these women, especially if the national narrative does not actively call for their engagement (as was the case with Rosie the Riveter). The conflict facilitates this change for the women who choose to do so, but social resistance means that participation will be less prevalent than passive nationalism. Stories from the women who did take this route will illustrate how much conflict motivated their actions, and whether the social changes created by conflict facilitated their participation.

Politics

Political institutions were an essential part of active nationalism, although they were largely unfriendly to women. However, the conflict should create opportunities as well as the motivation for women to attempt to engage in politics. Israeli women were able to participate in the political institution, but those who did faced a number of difficulties. Even now, the women who participate in the Knesset (Israeli Congress) rarely sit on the cabinet or in the most influential committees. They instead serve on education and service committees, which are seen as women's issues (Weiss and Yishai 167). The nationalist groups that were instrumental in the formation of Israel women had similarly low representation, and those who did participate in administrative and senior councils were regarded as atypical. Records of these groups note that "some women even reached senior ranks" and "one woman even became a member of central command" (Lapidot). The emphasis here is on their exceptionalism and that their presence was remarkable. The individual contributions of these women, it should be noted, were not highlighted by this record. However, one woman too important to Israeli politics to be ignored was Golda Meir. She was Prime Minister of Israel two years after the 1967 War,

but hers is perhaps the clearest example of the denial that comes with a woman leading within a male institution. David Ben Gurion referred to her as the “ablest man in the cabinet” to assure Israel and its allies that she was up to “the masculine task of leading the country and upholding social and political consensus” (Sharoni 99). Moreover, “the prime minister’s attitudes toward the women’s movement and her popular image as an Israeli legend, not as a “real” woman, set her apart...from most Israeli women” (Ibid). As the most significant example of female participation in Israeli politics, her experience is crucial--the fact that she was regarded as afeminine and atypical reinforces that active female nationalism was an act against the social norms of the time. For her and the Israeli women who participated at lower levels, it was clear that their participation was unusual enough to be either disregarded or viewed as unfeminine. The conflict that underwrote Israeli women’s political engagement was enough to motivate women, but the institutions were so entrenched that the participation of women was still viewed as an aberration.

Palestinian women engaged in politics by creating independent groups in support of the nationalist cause, but their efforts were largely sidelined by the central (male-led) movement. It was in context of the escalating conflict between 1929-1939 that Palestinian women decided to act by formally organizing their own political movement. This operated largely in the shadow of the male movement, but women nevertheless preached the nationalist cause to other women and led demonstrations (Fleischmann 16). Importantly, many of the women leading this movement were married to male nationalist leaders and the focus was entirely on spreading the message of nationalism in a way that women would understand. Subsequent female empowerment groups actually formed during low points of nationalist sentiment, which indicate that supporting nationalism

(actively or passively) does reinforce the existing gender roles (Abdulhadi 651). It is also well-documented that periods of high conflict (such as the first intifada) induced many more women to engage with nationalism at an active political level (Hiltermann 48). Palestinian women clearly viewed the national cause as a necessary and sufficient reason to engage in politics. However, even records that set out to specifically catalogue their involvement admit that women who have been involved in nationalist movement for much of their life are “unrecorded and unnoticed” by the larger dialogue about the movement and the movement itself (Kawar xi). In Palestine as well as in Israel, the active female engagement in nationalist politics that was prompted by the conflict was largely sidelined.

The experiences described above show that female engagement in male spheres, such as politics, is too sharp a departure from traditional gender roles to be welcomed by other parties. The conflict led to higher rates of participation in politics, especially among Palestinian women, but they still could not break into the decision-making sphere. Israeli women were also sidelined, and those who were accepted did so by fitting themselves into the existing male culture as much as possible. Given this, we see again that women are motivated to engage in active nationalism, but the increased barriers to their participation limit their full engagement.

Military Engagement

Military institutions experience the greatest needs during conflict, which in turn should create opportunities for women who are willing to participate. This would certainly be outside the existing norms and would contribute to broader change. However, it is still possible that within the military, willing and capable women who are

energized by the nationalist cause and cognizant of the need presented by conflict are utilized as supports rather than fighters. Israel's history draws the lines between the male, military sphere and female, private spheres very sharply (Herzog 61). Women are conscripted, but the roles they are allowed to participate in are drawn along gender lines (Izraeli 204, Golan 581). Importantly, Israeli women who strive for inclusion in these male spaces (especially in the formalized Israeli Defense Forces) tend to distance themselves from their own femininity (Sasson-Levy 440). The increasing presence of women in the military as the conflict increased is acknowledged, but it is actually portrayed by some as the reason for an alleged decline in the military. For some, allowing women into a male institution, even in the exceptional circumstances of conflict, is viewed as a necessary evil (van Creveld 82). Female Israeli presence in the military takes place primarily in supportive roles, highlighting the gender differences despite the intent of the women who enlist (Sharoni 45). The Israeli Defense Force accepts that women must participate, but it distances itself from this truth by having women serve in female capacities.

Palestinian militias are similar--women who choose to participate because they wish to serve the national cause are breaking gender norms, but the institution attempts to minimize this as much as possible. The women who participate acknowledge that they are used differently, but their belief in the national cause is sufficient motivation for them to continue (Antonius 35). Here again, women distance themselves from their femininity in an attempt to be taken seriously. One woman said that women wearing dresses were to blame for men not taking them seriously (Antonius 37). Importantly, militant actions in support of the Palestinian cause have included suicide bombs and other terrorist tactics.

Women who participate in this type of military activism actively challenge gender roles, but their ultimate dedication to the nationalist cause means they are celebrated as martyrs. However, many militant groups will refuse to prepare women for such a mission, showing that this supreme sacrifice is viewed as a male activity (Hasso 24). Other women who engage in less extreme forms of terrorism have found themselves shunned for their violation of gender norms (Berko and Erez 493). Palestinian women face the familiar scenario of being sidelined in male roles after attempting to further the nationalist cause during a time of conflict--including nontraditional forms of militancy such as terrorism.

Conflict should have presented both opportunities and motivation for women to engage in active forms of nationalism. There are certainly examples of women who desired to participate actively. However, the experiences of women who attempted to participate in political or military work as full participants rarely experienced a complete sense of belonging in the male-dominated institutions. Typically, women would be sidelined by the existing members in a way that reduced the broader effects of their engagement, and some who worked to be accepted in such an environment would attempt to minimize their own femininity. Overall, while conflict did motivate women to try to engage actively in crafting the nationalist narrative, existing social norms kept the additional opportunities conflict was expected to provide from materializing.

Rejection of Nationalism

The reciprocal relationship between conflict and nationalism does create tension--as the conflict increases, the nation will be damaged. As a result, the responses to conflict may not all be supportive of it. The destruction may lead people to question the logic behind the loyalty to nationalism, and women are well placed to ask those questions. As

external to the nationalist narrative, they should be more likely to question why it should result in conflict and even agitate for a different outcome such as peace. Separating this from a simple desire to end the conflict poses some issues--however, the number of women engaged in peace should indicate whether or not women have a unique perspective on ending the role of conflict and their nation. Their own stories and motivations for that activism will also add a descriptive element as to whether or not they are motivated to end the conflict because they are rejecting traditional nationalism.

On both the Israeli and Palestinian sides of the conflict, women have taken significant roles in agitating for and working towards peace. While there has been abundant commentary on how their actions relate to the cause of women's rights (Lentin 385, Holt 223), that is only tangential to the current topic--as is the abundantly proven fact that female engagement in peace increases the durability and sustainability of peace (Krause, Krause, and Braenfors 985). What is essential to this discussion is the prevalence of female peace activism in both Israel and Palestine. Exclusively female groups represent a solid majority of the peace activists (Sharoni 26). While enough commentators and individuals have read various interpretations into the actions taken by these women, these female-led groups were founded with the goal of increasing peace. This includes the Women in Black, Women Against the Invasion of Lebanon, Mothers Against Silence (also known as Parents Against Silence), Women for Political Prisoners; Shani—Israeli Women Against the Occupation, The Israel Women's Peace Net, the Coalition of Women for Peace, Women Wage Peace, and a number of other groups (Helman and Rapoport 681, Helman). Importantly, these various groups marked an important shift--women originally had to couch their activity in terms of motherhood and

care for their families. Here, they phrased their caretaking role as the motivation for ending the conflict. This draws strong parallels between the passive and active forms of nationalism and a rejection of it--women share the same narrative rooted in their role as caretakers. As time went on and female peace activism became more common, they participated as women instead of as mothers (Helman 292). This in itself is important--these women chose to transition their own initiative away from the role nationalism had written for them. Important also is the point that women on both sides have not only participated in nation-specific female peace organizations, they have also taken the significant step of working *with* each other by participating in cross-border activism (Kaufman and Williams 16). By the simple fact of creating that dialogue, women are acting in contrast with normative nationalist dialogue--they are challenging the vilification of the other that justifies nationalism and conflict (Daniele). However, acting outside the institution has its challenges as well--while the majority of activists are women, they are in the minority in actual negotiations (Hunt and Posa 194). While many factors play into that outcome, women choosing to act outside the spaces where they are marginalized are unlikely to increase their chances of being included (Sharoni 25). This does not seem to diminish women's activism for peace, nor the exploration of what that activism means for women as a whole. While the evidence presented here is more difficult to parse out than the others, the breadth of female peace activism does support the claim that conflict leads women to examine the nationalist endeavour more critically than others.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to explore whether or not conflict presented women with the motivation and the opportunity to engage in the nationalist conversation. Given the gendered nature of that narrative, nationalist engagement was examined in passive, active, and rejective mechanisms. Each one represents a different approach, but all require the intervention of conflict to legitimate their actions. It was expected that conflict would create both opportunity and motive, but this was present only in rejective nationalism. Passive nationalism seemed to arise out of ample motivation but required no new opportunity from conflict, while active nationalism again presented motive but no new opportunities due to the influence of strict social norms. This may seem dispiriting, as it implies that even when women are willing to work and sacrifice for their nation in its time of need they are not allowed to participate. However, the presence of rejective nationalism is an important reminder that women are agents, and they will participate in innovative and exciting ways regardless of the strictures placed upon them. This evidence also shows us that despite gendered narratives, women are able and willing to answer the needs of their community. The obvious resistance to their actions is less thrilling, but informative. Nevertheless, women do engage and that engagement carries the promise of changes within social roles (intended or otherwise). Those changes will have to be examined elsewhere, but the means by which they are accomplished (passive, active, and rejective nationalism) represent important steps forward themselves.

References:

- Abdulhadi, Rabab. "The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges." *Gender and Society*. 12, no. 6. (1998):649-673.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/190511>
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. (New York: Verso, 1991).
- Anderson, Benedict. *The Origins of Nationalism*. (New York: Verso, 1983).
- Anson, Jon and Avinoam Meir. "Religiosity, Nationalism and Fertility in Israel." *European Journal of Population* 12, no. 1. (1996): 1-25.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20164749>.
- Antonius, Soraya. "Fighting on Two Fronts: Conversations with Palestinian Women." *Journal of Palestine Studies*. 8, no. 3 (1979): 26-45.
- Baker, William D. and John R. O'Neal. "Patriotism Or Opinion Leadership?: The Nature and Origins of the "Rally 'Round the Flag" Effect." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 45, no. 5 (2001): 661-687. doi:10.1177/0022002701045005006.
- Berko, Anat and Edna Erez. "Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. 30, no. 6. (2007): 493-516.
- Berkovitch, Nitza. "Motherhood as a National Mission: The Construction of Womanhood in the Legal Discourse in Israel." *Women's Studies International Forum* 20, no. 5 (1997): 605-619. doi:10.1016/S0277-5395(97)00055-1.
- Connor, Walker. (1990) "When is a nation?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 13, no. 1. (1990):92-103, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.1990.9993663
- Daniele, Giulia. "Jerusalem Link Feminism between Palestine and Israel." *Ingenere*. 2014.
<https://www.ingenere.it/en/articles/jerusalem-link-feminism-between-palestine-and-israel>.
- Dugas, Christine. "Women in the PLO: Rifles, Fatigues, but no Veils." 1981. *Christian Science Monitor*. <https://www.csmonitor.com/1981/0731/073132.html>.
- Enloe, Cynthia H. *Bananas, Beaches & Bases*. (London: Pandora, 1989).

- Fleischmann, Ellen L. "The Emergence of the Palestinian Women's Movement, 1929-39." *Journal of Palestine Studies*. 29, no. 3. (1998):16-24.
- Fogiel-Bijaoui, Sylvie. "Kibbutz." *Jewish Women's Archive*.
<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/kibbutz>.
- Golan, Galia. "Militarization and gender: The Israeli Experience." *Women's Studies International Forum*. 2, no. 5-6. (1997):581-586.
- Haelyon, Hilla. "Longing for a Child": Perceptions of Motherhood among Israeli-Jewish Women Undergoing in vitro Fertilization Treatments." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*. 12. (2006):177-202.
- Hardin, Russell. "Self-Interest, Group Identity." In *Nationalism and Rationality*, edited by Albert Brenton, Gianluigi Galeotti, Pierre Salmon, Ronald Wintrobe. Cambridge University Press: New York, 1995.
- Hasso, Francis S. "Discursive and Political Deployments by/of the 2002 Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers/Martyrs." *Feminist Review*. 81, (2005):23-51.
- Helman, Sara. "From Soldiering and Motherhood to Citizenship: A Study of Four Israeli Peace Protest Movements." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. 6, no. 3. (1999):292-313.
- Helman, Sara. "Peace Movements in Israel." *Jewish Women's Archive*.
<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/peace-movements-in-israel>.
- Helman, Sara and Tamar Rapoport. "Women in Black: Challenging Israel's Gender and Socio-Political Orders." *The British Journal of Sociology*. 48, no. 4. (1997):681-700.
- Herzog, Hanna. "Homefront and Battlefield: The Status of Jewish and Palestinian Women in Israel." *Israel Studies*. 3, no. 1 (1998):61-84.
- Herzog, Hanna. "More than a Looking Glass: Women in Israeli Local Politics and the Media." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 3, no. 1 (1998): 26-47.
doi:10.1177/1081180X98003001004.

- Herzog, Hanna. "A Space of Their Own: Social-Civil Discourses Among Palestinian-Israeli Women in Peace Organizations." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*. 6, no. 3 (1999):344-369.
- Hiltermann, Joost R. "The Women's Movement During the Uprising." *Journal of Palestine Studies*. 20, no. 3 (1990): 48-58.
- Holt, Maria. "Palestinian Women, Violence, and the Peace Process." *Development in Practice*.13, no. 2-3. (2003):223-238.
- Hunt, Swanee and Cristina Posa. 2001. "Women Waging Peace." *Foreign Policy*, November 2009. p. 38-47.
- Izraeli, Dafna N. "Paradoxes of Women's Service in Israeli Defense Forces." In *Military, State, and Society in Israel: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Daniel Maman, Eyal Ben-Ari, and Zeev Rosenhek, 203-238. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2001.
- Kanaaneh, Rhoda Ann. *Birth of the Nation*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).
- Kawar, Amal. *Daughters of Palestine: Leading Women of the Palestinian National Movement*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).
- Kaufman, Joyce P. and Kristen P. Williams. *Women at War, Women Building Peace: Challenging Gender Norms*. (London: Kaumarian Press, 2013).
- Krause, Jana, Werner Krause, and Piia Braenfors. "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace." *International Interactions: Empirical and Theoretical Research in International Relations*. 44, no. 6. (2018):985-1016.
- Laitin, David D. *Nations, States, and Violence*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Lapidot, Yehuda. "Irgun Zeva'i Le'Umami." *Jewish Women's Archive*.
<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/irgun-zevai-leummi-izl>.
- Lentin, Ronit. "Israeli and Palestinian Women Working for Peace." *Peace Review*. 8, no. 3. (1996):385-390.

- Massad, Joseph. "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism." *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 3 (1995): 467-483.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4328835>.
- Mayer, Tamar. *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*. (London: Routledge, 2012).
- Mittal, Ruby. "Ordered Milestones of Women's Political Representation." Our World In Data. Oxford Martin Programme on Global Development. 2019.
<https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/ordered-milestones-of-womens-political-representation?time=1907..2017>
- Mosse, George L. *Nationalism and Sexuality*. (New York: H. Fertig, 1985).
- Nagel, Joane. "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 2 (1998): 242-269.
doi:10.1080/014198798330007.
- Ortiz-Ospina, Esteban, Sandra Tzvetkova and Max Roser. "Women's Employment." Our World In Data. Oxford Martin Programme on Global Development. 2018.
<https://ourworldindata.org/female-labor-supply>
- Roser, Max and Esteban Ortiz-Ospina. "Literacy." Our World In Data. Oxford Martin Programme on Global Development. First published in 2013, last revised in 2018.
<https://ourworldindata.org/literacy>
- Rubenberg, Cheryl. *Palestinian Women* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001).
- Sasson-Levy, Orna. "Feminism and Military Gender Practices: Israeli Women Soldiers in "Masculine" Roles." *Sociological Inquiry*. 73, no. 3 (2003):440-465.
- Sayigh, Rosemary and Julie Petet. "Between Two Fires: Palestinian Women in Lebanon." In *Women and Political Conflict*, edited by Rosemary Ridd and Helen Callaway. University Press: New York, NY, 1987.
- Sharoni, Simona. *Gender and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

- Sharoni, Simona. "The Myth of Gender Equality and the Limits of Women's Political Dissent in Israel." *Middle East Report*. 207 (1998):24-28.
- Shavit, Ari. *My Promised Land*. (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013).
- Stoler-Liss, Sachlav. "Mothers Birth the Nation": The Social Construction of Zionist Motherhood in Wartime in Israeli Parents' Manuals." *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues*. 6. (2003):104-118.
- Van Creveld, Martin. "Armed But Not Dangerous: Women in the Israeli Military." *War in History*. 7, no. 1. (2000):82-98.
- Weiss, Shevach and Yael Yishai. "Women's Representation in Israeli Political Elites." *Jewish Social Studies* 42, no. 2 (1980): 165-176.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4467082>.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. "National Reproduction and 'the Demographic Race' in Israel." In *Woman, Nation, State*, edited by Nira Yuval-Davis, Floya Anthias and Jo Campling. Macmillan, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Hampshire, 1989.
- Zaretsky, Robert. "We are all Isaiah Berliners Now." *Foreign Policy*, November 2018.
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/11/07/we-are-all-isaiah-berliners-now/>.