# TRAPPED ESCAPE: YOUNG PALESTINIAN WOMEN AND THE ISRAELI NATIONAL-CIVIC SERVICE

By Suhad Daher-Nashif

When I finished high school, I looked for a job because I wanted to save money for my academic studies. I wanted to help my parents. I found a job in town, but most places asked me to work nine to ten hours a day for a very low wage, around ten shekels per hour. I didn't want to work out of town, because I knew that my father would not agree to that, and I didn't want to work late hours in malls. My father heard about work in the civic service from a friend, who explained the benefits and that it would help me in my future studies. My father and I decided to try it. I found it very convenient in different ways: I worked near home, with people I knew; I could go home early; and there were a lot of benefits during the service and after it.<sup>2</sup>

Rima is a young Palestinian woman who lives in occupied Palestine/Israel and serves in the Israeli national-civic service.<sup>3</sup> Her experiences shed light on the contingencies and complexities of being a Palestinian, and particularly a Palestinian woman, with citizenship in Israel. While scholars have often employed the notion of an ongoing Nakba, or catastrophe, to describe the

Suhad Daher-Nashif is in the Department of Education at Al-Qasimi College of Education and Oranim College of Education. post-1948 realities of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the diaspora, the Palestinians in Israel are just as mired in an ongoing and, in some ways, more intimate struggle with the Israeli state. Indeed, the demolition of Bedouin Palestinian homes and villages in the Naqab is the most immediate, but certainly not the only, evidence of Israel's expansive and brutal attempts to maintain settler-colonial control over contested lands, people, resources, and power. Palestinian citizenship in Israel is a site of struggle between a disenfranchised and colonized group of Palestinians and a state that is premised on the ongoing confiscation of those Palestinians' lands and their claims to national self-determination.

Several scholars have argued that Israel uses its national-civic service as an apparatus for both interrogating and achieving Palestinian loyalty to the Zionist state and its agenda. Most of this research has focused on political ramifications and social attitudes. Yet, by and large, the national-civic service has targeted young women and it is mostly with that demographic group that it has been successful. The voices and experiences of these women are absent from both the scholarly and the political discursive landscapes. To fill this lacuna and to study the intersections between gender, the family, economy, the state, and politics, this article explores how Rima and the thirty other young women I interviewed navigated their volunteer work in the national-civic service. This study examines the complex web of considerations, interests, and strategies in which the national-civic service takes shape as a trapped escape.

The Israeli national-civic service, known as Sherut Leumi-Izrahi, began in the 1970s as an alternative to military service for religious-Zionist Jewish Israeli girls exempt from the draft.<sup>8</sup> In the late 1990s, sixty young Palestinian women and men participated in a pilot program of community-based national-civic service launched by the Israeli government, after two Palestinian municipalities positively responded to the government's initiative.<sup>9</sup> This step sought to "Israelize" Palestinian identity and, at the same time, foment internal divisions. Such maneuvers are not new, as Israel has historically used various tactics intended to dispossess Palestinians of their indigeneity, including integrating Palestinian subgroups in the armed forces.<sup>10</sup> In 2007, the government adopted the recommendations of the Ivri Committee to extend eligibility for national-civic service to additional groups exempt from military service and to establish the Administration

for National-Civic Service. National-civic service was thereby expanded to include ultra-Orthodox male youth, male and female Palestinian youth who had finished high school and still lived inside the Israeli state borders, and youth exempted from the military on health grounds.11 Druze and Circassian young men must serve in the Israeli military, while the young women of these two groups are exempt.12 They are now able to choose to serve in the national-civic service as well.<sup>13</sup> According to Israel's Law Book from July 2014, there are two types of national-civic service. 14 The first is "social service" in "internal security, front protection, educational institutes, health care, welfare, elderly institutes, environmental protection, road traffic safety, community safety, employment promotion, and immigrant absorption." The second is "security service" in the police, the prison guards, environmental and beach protection units, the national authority for firefighting and rescue, the witness protection authority, and Magen David Adom (the Israeli national emergency medical organization).15 The volunteer workers in the national-civic social service work thirty hours per week for two years or twenty hours per week for three years in an authorized setting. Security service volunteer workers work for thirty-six hours per week for two years. 16 They are compensated with a monthly salary equal to less than minimum wage in addition to discounts at various public and private venues. Volunteers also receive a lump sum at the end of their service if they complete the entire service period. In March 2017, the Knesset approved the Civic Service Law. This new law added several regulations. These included that the service can be performed for one or two years, that the volunteer cannot replace a formal worker, that the volunteering must be done at an institution that recognizes the existence of Israel as a democratic Jewish state, and that each institution can use civic service volunteers to compose up to eighteen percent of its workforce. The announcement of the new law on the civic service authority's website declares: "There is no doubt that this law will enlarge the number of volunteers and improve this national project to the benefit of the state of Israel and Israeli society."17

The number of Palestinians enrolled as national-civic service volunteers doubled, from 628 to 1,256, during the two-year period from 2007 to 2009. The number of applicants increased at an even greater rate. In 2014 the number of Palestinian volunteers was 3,748. This dramatic increase

in participation can be explained, in essence, as resulting from the low socioeconomic status of the Palestinian community. A study conducted by Palestinian sociologist Mtanes Shihadeh found that Palestinians involved in Israeli national-civic service viewed it as a means of attaining financial benefits and advancing personal interests. 19 Muhannad Mustafa, a scholar of political science, argues that the political goals of the Israeli national-civic service and the Jewish state are generally to exploit the relative poverty of Palestinians. Participants earn special status and benefits in exchange for loyalty to the state.<sup>20</sup> Mustafa argues that the groundwork for the nationalcivic service system for Palestinians was laid from 2003 to 2005, under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Sharon's government claimed that Palestinians could "earn" rights based on their loyalty to the state. The director of Shlomit, an Israeli organization that recruits national-civic service volunteers, contends that the rise in Arab participation reveals "the desire of young Arabs to merge into Israeli society. . . . Many Arabs realize that national-civic service is an important stage for their resumes in order to integrate into Israeli society."<sup>21</sup> This is an example of the Israeli policy of encouraging minorities to perform Israeli national duties in order to gain rights. Thus, access to rights is contingent on the erasure of Palestinian national identity and the performance of loyalty to the Israeli state.

#### Palestinian Opposition

Palestinian activists, NGOs, and community institutions began to register opposition to the national-civic service initiative targeting Palestinian youth, especially following the Ivri recommendations in 2007. They mobilized a campaign against the initiative, which they feared would set a precedent for mandatory national-civic, and possibly military, service for Palestinians in the future.<sup>22</sup> Despite the powerful allure of national-civic service, the majority of young Palestinians living in Israel (or historical Palestine) oppose it. An opinion poll conducted by Mada al-Carmel, the Arab Center for Applied Social Research, shows that about seventy percent of young Palestinian men and women oppose national-civic service participation.<sup>23</sup> This opposition reveals an awareness of the state structure as premised on ongoing colonization. This perception was heightened after the October 2000 uprising, when Israeli military and security forces killed thirteen young

Palestinian citizens who demonstrated against Israel's attacks on the Gaza Strip and West Bank during the second intifada. The 2000 uprising was one component of a much broader trajectory of confrontation between the Israeli state and Palestinians occupied by Israel since 1948. 24 These direct confrontations between the state and Palestinian citizens, who were once again making broad calls of solidarity with their national compatriots and opposing Israeli settler-colonialism, led the Israeli political leadership to develop plans emphasizing the Jewishness of the Israeli state and connecting rights to duties.25 As Prime Minister Sharon put it: "The main mission of all of us [Zionist Jews] is structuring a democratic Jewish Israel, a state in which gaining rights and distributing burdens is done by working in the national-civic service, in one way or another."26 An intensive Israeli attempt to incorporate more Palestinians in the national-civic service system followed.<sup>27</sup> These attempts at ensuring the Palestinians' fidelity were not new. They began during the mid-1950s when Israel tried to draft Palestinian citizens into army service. 28 As Rhoda Kanaaneh explains, the debate at the time made it clear that "the service in question is to the Iewish collective."29

This state imperative to secure citizen service to the Jewish collective could explain the opposition of Palestinian society and its political leadership to national-civic service. In a study based on twenty in-depth interviews, Shihadeh found that the majority of Palestinian political and civil organization leaders oppose Palestinian youths' involvement in the national-civic service. They perceive it as aimed at distorting national identity. Most of the interviewees claimed that Israeli attempts to incorporate Palestinians in the project seek to restructure the relationship between the state and Palestinian citizens.<sup>30</sup>

Raef Zreik, a scholar of law and political theory, has argued that the Israeli state's demand that Palestinians participate in the national-civic service is a sort of ambush of the Palestinian political leadership, which continues to call for a democratic state for all of Israel's citizens. Israel claims that if the Palestinians want the state to normalize its relations with them and treat them as full citizens, then Palestinians should first act as full citizens, normalize their relations with the state, and perform civic duties. History and present-day Israeli practices, however, show that such service has not protected Palestinians from ongoing dispossession. On the contrary,

the demand that Palestinians perform civic duties reprises a longstanding colonial tactic that confines hopes for the future to the boundaries drawn by the state. For example, even though some Bedouin and Druze men serve in the Israeli armed forces, Israel has since its establishment practiced home demolition and expropriation of lands in the Naqab, where most of the Palestinian Bedouin people live. Israel also demolishes unlicensed homes built by Druze, but not by Jewish citizens. Furthermore, there are persistent policies of ethnic discrimination in budgetary allocations for education and welfare for Bedouins and Druze despite their military service. Palestinians in Israel continue to be excluded and oppressed, regardless of their demonstrations of "loyalty" to the state.

The national-civic service project heavily targets women and its gendered impact is broad. Approximately 1,459 Palestinians participated in national-civic service in 2010. Roughly ninety percent of them were women.<sup>33</sup> The national-civic service places these women in the fields of health and education. Sixty-one percent of placements are in educational frameworks, twenty-four percent are in the health system, and fifteen percent are in other government institutions.34 As Sami Smooha and Zohar Lechtman have shown, national-civic service among Palestinians is a largely female domain. Young women volunteer in far greater numbers due to limited employment opportunities after high school graduation.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, nearly every report on Palestinian women's status and rights highlights the low participation of women in the formal labor force.<sup>36</sup> Countrywide, the labor force participation of Palestinian women above the age of fifteen amounts to 24.9 percent and, for women aged twentyfive to sixty-four, to 32.3 percent. These participation rates are far below those of Jewish women, which are 61.8 percent for women over the age fifteen and 78.7 percent for those aged twenty-five to sixty-four.<sup>37</sup> Rikaz Center data indicate the enduring economic crisis of Palestinian women in particular and the Palestinian community in Israel in general.<sup>38</sup> This economic reality is linked to the greater engagement of young Palestinian women in national-civic service. In 2009, promotional materials directed at Palestinian women held out the promise of government jobs for those who completed national-civic service.<sup>39</sup>

Like many women, Palestinians confront oppression, control, and corporal discipline at the level of the state as well as their own social appa-

ratuses. The social patriarchy is colonized and the colonializing state is patriarchal. Palestinian women are vulnerable politically, legally, socially, economically, and culturally. Both internal and external hierarchies marginalize Palestinian women in various fields and practices. 40 Women are increasingly vulnerable to repression and their bodies are sites for the enactment of repressive social and political forces. As a result and in parallel, a dynamic Palestinian feminist movement has waged a broad struggle against social and political powers. 41 The participation of Palestinian women in the labor market in Israel is low due to both discriminatory state policies and social practices that limit employment possibilities. 42 Women's participation in the national-civic service reveals the mutually constitutive nature of Israeli colonial and Palestinian social structures. This intersectionality is wide-ranging and powerful. This article explores the range and power of this intersectionality and the ways in which women use a colonial apparatus to escape patriarchal norms. 43 This "trapped escape" is one way to think and rethink Palestinian experience in Israel as well as the imposition of and resistance to gender norms more broadly.

I conducted interviews between November 2012 and March 2013 with young women living in the "Triangle," a predominantly Palestinian area located in the middle of Israel/Palestine.<sup>44</sup> The ages of the women ranged from eighteen to twenty-seven and each of them was serving or had served in the Israeli national-civic service.<sup>45</sup> My position as a lecturer at a local college afforded me access to these young women. I identified the first four interviewees with the help of students at the college where I taught, and the snowball strategy enabled me to reach the rest of them.<sup>46</sup> Social opposition to the service made many young women reluctant to talk. Some of the women I interviewed knew me from the college, while others heard about me through friends. Most interviews took place at the interviewee's home. Eleven, almost a third of the total, asked not to be recorded. Through active listening, body language, and facial expression, I relayed to the young women that, most of all, I sought to learn from their lives and experiences.

In what follows, I reflect on the reasons leading young women into the "service" experience; the structure of the experience itself; and effects of the experience on the young women's personal, social, and political lives and perceptions.

#### **Motives**

After I graduated high school, I started looking for a job because I had decided I wanted to take a year off before going to university. My biggest problem was that I couldn't find a job, and what was worse is that my parents are very conservative, which means that they would not allow me to work at just any place, like a shop in town or at the mall, because they worry about me a lot. A friend of mine called and said that one of the young women quit and that there would be a place available for me to work if I wanted to replace her. Since it was a job in our town and at a health clinic, my parents would agree—it is a respectable position. So it was easy to convince them, and indeed, they allowed me to work.<sup>47</sup>

Maysun is twenty-two and performed national-civic service at a public health clinic in her town. Like eighteen of the young women interviewed (sixty percent), she claimed her main reason for considering national-civic service was the comfort of a job close to home that would mollify her parents' concerns and desire for control over her movements. When I asked why they preferred the national service to locally owned businesses, many women responded that the working conditions at Palestinian-owned businesses were more difficult. Many workers at such enterprises do not receive the benefits that national-civic service affords. Fida', who is nineteen and served one year at her town's public health clinic, explained:

I served in the national-civic service because my parents were primarily against any type of job outside of town, and you know how work here is. I would have had to leave early in the morning and come back late in the evening, and you know how Arab bosses deal with workers, even from the perspective of the paycheck. So I found that service in town was better for me.<sup>48</sup>

Fida', along with ten other interviewees (one-third of the participants), said that her parents dismissed the possibility that she find work in the private Arab sector, such as offices, shops, and factories. In addition to having negative perceptions of working conditions, parents sought to shield their daughters from gender mixing and social intimacy in the workplace.

Another reason young women joined the national-civic service was a general lack of available jobs elsewhere. Ten young women (one-third)

looked for a job in the private sector but did not find one. Five young women (one-sixth) did find socially appropriate jobs, but abandoned them due to poor working conditions. Fifteen young women (half of the interviewees) did not look for work at all, either due to parental restrictions or because their encounter with national-civic service preempted the job search. For many women, this landscape of limited opportunities makes national-civic service the only option. As Samira put it:

When I was eighteen years old, I decided to enter this service. I finished high school and was trained as a medical secretary. When I graduated, I tried to find a job, but couldn't. After having tried so hard, and being very bored, I mentioned it to our family doctor and he directed me to this job. It had only one condition and that is I have to work in this civic service. 49

Samira was twenty-three years old and unemployed when I interviewed her. She had served for two years in a public health clinic at a neighboring town. Samira, like fourteen other young women I interviewed, was in urgent need of money. Seven women reported boredom and an excess of free time, and three mentioned that they joined the service because Israeli national insurance stops providing financial support for children when they are eighteen. 50 Lyn, aged twenty, said: "My parents used to get the insurance payment until I turned eighteen. . . . My financial situation is a bit difficult, and I need to buy things that my parents cannot afford to get for me."51 Lyn sought to support her parents and also to gain financial independence. Every young woman reported a number of overlapping reasons for entering the service. For some, boredom led them to search for work. Those who could not find a job accepted national-civic service as a ready solution. Others' options were limited by parental restrictions on leaving town. Some young women cited potential racism in mixed Israeli spaces as a reason to remain in town. This reflects the paradox of Palestinian life in Israel: although an alternative to military service, national-civic service provides no guarantee of a reprieve from racism.

The majority of the parents of the young women interviewed for this study supported the idea that their daughters serve in the national-civic service. The parents of eighteen (sixty percent) of the young women accepted the idea without any opposition. The parents of eleven young women (about

thirty-seven percent) initially opposed their daughters' participation for reasons that ranged from nationalist to patriarchal.<sup>52</sup> Ultimately, however, they were convinced and did not prevent their daughters from serving. Thus, young women's participation in civic service requires parental assent and permission. Only one of the interviewees' fathers explicitly refused. She participated for six months and then left.

Parental authority could also function to convince objecting women to participate. I interviewed Asil when she was twenty years old. She had served for a year at a school in her town. Her father had convinced her to volunteer even though she resisted:

Work is really limited for young women. My father, who supported me and encouraged me a lot to be involved in the national-civic service, is a school principal. He told me that this will help me in the future in my studies and to find work. I didn't really accept the service and didn't want to serve, because I know that our community opposes this. I asked my father if they would take me to serve in the army if I did, and he said that isn't true.<sup>53</sup>

According to the young women, parental acceptance of their service was based on two main rationales: geographic proximity and parental control, as well as the potential benefit from earnings.

In contrast to the young women's nuclear families, relatives, friends, and neighbors generally expressed criticism and rejection of their participation in the national-civic service. Twenty of the thirty young women (two-thirds) discussed this rejection, which points to the broader Palestinian opposition that the various surveys discussed above have evidenced. Sana', who served at the age of eighteen, noted:

Socially, the service affected me severely because all those around me ended up opposing me. My parents and some of my relatives did approve, but many relatives and friends criticized me. In my opinion, this [view] is backward, because I serve my town in my town. I do not serve the Jewish people.<sup>54</sup>

The majority of the young women I interviewed disregarded the community's position. In a few cases, social pressure resulted in young women leaving the service. Shireen, aged twenty-one, had secured her father's approval but

left the service after three months because of the gossip and criticism from people around her. Women left the service for three reasons: understanding the nature of service only after beginning work, strong social opposition, or explicit parental refusal.

I generally found that when parents encouraged participation in the service, daughters mustered the confidence to face social rejection. These young women may also have felt confidence because they were serving the state, which they imagined could protect them. May, a twenty-year old who served at a clinic in her town, explained how she dealt with social opposition:

One of my relatives was serving in the national-civic service and helped me in this regard. Let's say that the majority of the family, just like the majority of the community, was opposed. In time, I managed to pass on to them my point of view, and some were somewhat convinced. 55

In addition to the family and community dynamics surrounding young women's participation in national-civic service, the decision to join was complicated by a lack of access to information. These young women based their decision to enlist on limited accounts from friends and others who had previously served in the service. A few searched for information on the Internet, but only after beginning their service. Furthermore, the majority of online information they found was on sites supporting service, such as the official site of the National-Civic Service Authority. Five of the young women (one-sixth) were not even aware that their positions were part of the national-civic service system at the time of their enlistment. They thought they were volunteering for their villages or cities in exchange for a symbolic sum. Rim, aged twenty, cried when she found out that she was working in the Israeli national-civic service. She served for less than a year in her town, explaining:

Some of my friends found out that I was working in the national-civic service and explained that it is a substitute for military service. When I understood this, I started crying. I cried so much, because I am a nationalist. But you know how around here we are unaware of these things. Our people know nothing. They walk around blindly. So after I found out, I immediately quit this job. <sup>56</sup>

In contrast to Rim, the majority of the young women I interviewed had prior knowledge that their work in the national-civic service was an alternative

to military service. In some cases, however, young women sought information and views about the national-civic service only after enlisting and working for some time. Their young age, political immaturity, and fear of repercussions inhibited most from leaving the service after understanding its reality and regretting their decision. They feared the price they might pay for breaking their contracts.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, four young women bluntly said that they always knew the meaning of national-civic service and consciously chose to serve the state. Sana' claimed:

I did encounter opposition from my friends who said to me that this is just like the military and that it is serving the state. So what! Let it be a service to the state. Do we want to have rights without duties? Just like you want to take, you have to give. 58

Sana' held a minority view. Most of the young women had some misgivings about their service. The voice of Sana' reflects how the state's discourse of loyalty and belonging can seep into youth consciousness and shape the political attitudes of colonized subjects. The rights-duties discourse can work perfectly in a context where women have no opportunities for economic independence.

## Negotiating Service in Community Contexts

In this case study, there were three attitudes within the Palestinian community on the Israeli national-civic service. One criticizes and resists, the second rejects service in principle but tolerates it for economic benefit, and the third accepts the idea and readily participates. In addition to the wider social pressure, young women frequently met opposition from staff members in their service placements.<sup>59</sup> As time passed and the young women negotiated the social pressures they faced, they attained acceptance in their workplaces. The passage of time seemed to obscure the origins of their involvement in service to the state. Rana, aged twenty, who served for two years at a home for the elderly, explained:

When I started to work at the home for the elderly, the national-civic service project had just started there. One of the main workers there told the elderly people there about what we do, that we serve the state of Israel. At the beginning, we experienced a resilient resistance from the elderly. They were saying things like, "What are you doing

here? You are traitors!" and so on. But after we explained, and after we started helping them, slowly, they started to see that we are there to help them and not to serve the state of Israel, and gradually they started to like us and get attached to us.<sup>60</sup>

Hiba was twenty-two and served for two years in a public health clinic. She expressed two social attitudes toward the civic service: "At the workplace, the secretary was opposed, but the others were okay with it and said that it was my right." It is important to note that twenty of the young women (two-thirds) said that the main hardship they faced during their service was the community's objection and the gossip they heard at the workplace. Asil noted, "At the school where I worked, there were many teachers who were against this thing and used to say things to us like, 'Why would you serve?' 'You do not have to do this!' 'You are helping the state!' and so forth."

The young women did not see the national-civic service as a political program in support of the state. Some of them stressed that many people viewed and treated them as regular members of the staff at a public health clinic or school. Maysun explained: "People thought that I was working there as a secretary, just like those who actually work there. Everybody respected me and respected the workplace." In addition to the reaction of employees and patients at health clinics, the parents of schoolchildren also had varied reactions. Some were opposed and critical, while others were more understanding and accepting. Nay, aged twenty, gave an example:

One time, a father of a child talked to me in private and said, "This is unacceptable.<sup>63</sup> Why would you enter this kind of thing? This isn't appropriate for us. This kind of work does not suit us as Arabs." He also said that if there were a war, I would be forced to serve in the army.<sup>64</sup>

Some of the young women noted the role of religious figures in structuring their experience. Some Muslim shaykhs prohibited participation while others authorized it. Haya, aged twenty-one, sought religious counsel:

Before entering the service, the first thing I asked was whether it is allowed (*halal*) or prohibited (*haram*). I asked some shaykhs and they said that it is not prohibited, as I would be working and would not be serving the Jews or killing anyone. They said it was okay because I would be serving my town and nothing more than that.<sup>65</sup>

Approaching religious officials for approval empowered some young women to confront social rejection. Serving the state under the title of voluntary work within the Palestinian town or village made invisible that the national-civic service is a Zionist project. That invisibility made it easier for young women and the religious figures to confront social opposition. Historically, religious figures have played an essential role in maintaining the authority of the state and its military institutions. There are other clerics, however, both Muslim and Christian, who oppose national-civic service and challenge their colleagues' endorsements.

The young women also described how service workers, both Israeli and Palestinian, provided support and training in confronting social pressure. Rana, the woman who served in a home for the elderly, said:

I didn't think about renouncing the service because the woman who was in charge of us stood by our side all the time. She was Arab, and supported us and encouraged us and told us not to listen to anybody. She helped us see what we were really there to do.<sup>66</sup>

The Palestinian agent supporting the young women functions here as a mediator between the Palestinian society and the Israeli state. Hiba explains how these mediators attain trust:

Since we face many hardships with the people in our city, especially because we are young, the civic service gives us workshops and explains to us how to deal with people, how to endure this difficulty, and they tell us what to do after the service and which benefits we will achieve.<sup>67</sup>

This mediation, as well as the promise of a "big prize" at the end of service, enables young women to withstand social rejection, guards them against criticism, and ensures their continued participation. Dire economic conditions, the scarcity of jobs for young Palestinian women, and family opposition to working out of town informed the attitudes of these young women. Arguably, these conditions leave these young women with few options but the civic service. More urgent here is understanding of the multiple ways in which patriarchal social norms work alongside colonialism. Confronting these norms is key to empowering women economically.

#### Effects of Service on Daily Life

The young women I interviewed enumerated several positive effects of national-civic service on their personal lives. Since clients at each institute where they volunteered did not necessarily know their affiliation or the service's goals, they gained respect, admiration, and appreciation for their positive contributions. Working in the national-civic service earned these young women an economic and social status they had not experienced when they stayed at home. The service made these young women socially visible and valuable. Parents became proud of their daughters and did not feel forced to give explanations or to justify their daughters' work, as they would if they were working outside of town or in private businesses. The people who attend the formal institutions perceived the young women as volunteers who provided much needed assistance. They admired their work and were unaware of the state structure that informed it. As such, the colonial apparatus of turning Arabs into servants of the state became invisible.

Material reward was a benefit the majority of the women I interviewed reiterated. Service afforded women a certain economic independence, an ability to contribute to the family budget, and in turn a sense of empowerment. Rampant poverty among Palestinians leads women and their parents to consider national-civic service an optimal solution, even if the financial return is little more than a pittance. Despite their low wages, the young women expressed their pride in paying the tuition for their first year of college. After completing the service period, volunteers receive a grant that they can use for college tuition, or for other projects such as marriage or purchase of a car. The money was transferred directly to their bank account. Suha, twenty-two years old, had served for two years at the public health clinic in her town:

It was sufficient for me that I worked at a respectable place and that I dealt with doctors and respectable people. Apart from that, I used to earn one thousand Israeli shekels each month, and when I completed work, I received two thousand shekels. Also, there were six thousand shekels that I received as a check for college. So, do I need anything better than this? Should I stay at home within four walls? Or do I do this work?<sup>68</sup>

Despite the symbolic amount (approximately 280 US dollars for a forty-hour work week, about one-third of the minimum wage), the actual benefits of the national-civic service stipend exceed the material.<sup>69</sup> The young women want to get out of the house. They want to work and escape unemployment and boredom. They want to feel free of the control exerted upon them at home, to be visible and respected, to have goals and a social life. The national-civic service thereby becomes a tool young women use to strengthen their economic and social position.

Young women also received discount cards applicable to such expenditures as public transportation, including the train and bus lines, apparel, and entertainment, such as the Super Land amusement park. Another benefit from working in the national-civic service that several of the young women mentioned was going on trips and tours together with other volunteers and managers of the national-civic service and with the staff of the institutions where they worked. These trips were a valued outlet for the young women. Asil explained:

There are young women whose parents do not allow them to work in distant places, so usually the national-civic service is close to home, and the place where she would work is respectable, like a public clinic or a school. There is another thing, which is that we used to go on excursions—like once we went to Acre and had a wonderful time. We enjoyed the change of scenery a lot.<sup>70</sup>

Participating in activities and socializing outside of family circles becomes permissible for these young women and provides another channel to escape domestic constraints and social patriarchy. Young women also described meeting new people and acquiring social skills. They developed greater social awareness, flexibility, and openness, which gave them greater self-confidence. As members of educational or medical staff, they also acquired skills useful for future professions in teaching, nursing, or medical administration.

The most prominent negative effect of national-civic service participation was social rejection and disdain. The women also noted financial exploitation. Even though they received a stipend, the young women stated that it was very small when compared to the amount of work they did. They received the equivalent of around six Israeli shekels per hour (US \$1.50), when the minimum wage in Israel is 26.88 Israeli shekels (US \$7.50) per

hour, and five thousand Israeli shekels (US \$1,500) per month. Some young women who served in an institute also experienced racism. Samar, for example, served at the age of eighteen for six months at a public health clinic in Hadera (a Jewish city).<sup>71</sup> She left the service: "In addition to the racism I faced on daily basis from people and staff members, what made me even more angry and regretful was the fact that I really felt that I was severely used. They made me work beyond my power and this made me feel that I had made the wrong decision."

### Volunteers' Perceptions

The vast majority of the interviewees described their voluntary work in terms of social service to the community. They understood themselves as contributing humane work that benefited local people rather than the state. Sina, aged nineteen and today a university student, explained: "Every year, the number of Arabs serving increases. This is because it gives us something that is lacking, like money or independence. It is a service for our own town, for our people and community." The majority of the young women (twenty, or two-thirds) defined the national-civic service as a service to the community: "I am a volunteer in my town. It is not like military service because I do not carry a weapon and do not kill anyone." Ten of the young women (one-third) expressed a negative attitude toward the service and emphasized drawbacks despite its direct personal and social benefits. They said, "The service is in contradiction to the fact that we are Arabs," and, "It is a way to erase our identity." These young women live this contradiction or duality, that is in many senses a microcosm of the broader condition of Palestinians living in Israel. 72 The Nakba and the establishment of the Israeli state in Palestine in 1948 left the Palestinians who remained in a paradoxical position. Palestinians suddenly became a segregated ethnic minority in their homeland, and to some extent they were also isolated from the Arab world. This unique situation motivated Palestinians to create their own strategies for surviving and resisting colonialism. Many sought to maintain their national identity despite their official affiliation with Israel's formal institutions. For these young women, Israel's national-civic service was a tool of self-empowerment, a tactic of survival.

Two-thirds of the young women assessed their work in the service as a "nice and interesting" experience, saying it was "fun and novel" and "wonderful and enjoyable." In contrast, a minority of the young women articulated a negative impact. One participant suggested the service's only positive benefit in these words: "I now know the real meaning of the national-civic service." The majority of the young women, however, expressed satisfaction with their decision to work and with the experience. The colonial system thus succeeds in utilizing the patriarchal system trapping young Palestinian women. In attracting them to serve the state, the national-civic service provides illusory promises to young women seeking avenues out of their own crises, while entrenching them further in identity and national crisis.

One-third of the young women said that they did not recommend the national-civic service experience to others. Five interviewees advised young women to work in the national-civic service only within the framework of a local Arab institution, in order to serve their own communities. An additional three women recommended the service only if a woman is unable to find a job elsewhere. These young women justified their participation in the national-civic service by equating it with community service and charitable work. The young women use this justification to defend their involvement in the civic service, in part perhaps to cushion their expression of desire for "freedom" in front of their family and community.

#### Reflections on Service

The Israeli national-civic service project succeeded in utilizing the low economic status of Palestinian women, their need for jobs, and their limited access to the Israeli labor market as a means of conscripting them in the Israeli national agenda. This agenda, importantly, was largely invisible to the young women. The young women saw their immediate and basic needs and rights fulfilled through their work in the civic service. Thus, the national-civic service positions replaced paid positions, thereby reducing overall government spending on positions for Palestinian women, which is already low when compared to that on Palestinian men and Jewish women and men. The majority of young women in the Israeli national-civic service are confined to service in their hometowns under the visible control of their parents and community. This social and familial control renders the state's

control invisible; the women are in limbo where they are controlled visibly by society and invisibly by the state.<sup>73</sup> The young women do not interact with Israeli Jewish society, making that society invisible to them. What they see in places of service is their own society, the people of their towns, the children, the elderly, and the ill. This arrangement makes it easier for the state to promote national-civic service, not as a national project serving Zionist interests, but as work serving the local community.

For some of the women I interviewed, Israeli national-civic service makes them visible to their society, bestowing on them a social value that they had previously lacked and enabling them to achieve a respected status. This transition from being marginalized to being visible plays a considerable role in enhancing the young women's self-esteem within the bounds of the patriarchal framework. Let us remember, however, that the national-civic service is part of a political program aimed at erasing the Palestinian subject. In this context, young women thus need to erase their national Palestinian identity in order to attain a personal social presence. Furthermore, the young women are not directly viewed as servants of the state; they perform this role only invisibly. This dichotomy of (in)visible existence is common in contexts of repression and resistance. Thus, the means of Israeli state control are invisible to the Palestinians, and the Palestinians in turn are invisible in the Jewish state.

It is not the threat of violence, but simply Palestinian presence that invokes fear for Israeli state institutions and social structures. The Palestinian citizen in Israel is a feared other. When young Palestinian women worked in Israeli Jewish institutes as national-civic servants, they experienced farranging racism and discrimination. This could be a factor in decisions of many of the young women to remain in their own communities.

The Israeli effort to engage with government-run institutes located in Palestinian community spaces does not simply enable women to work, as Israeli state rhetoric would have it. It serves as a way to engage Palestinians as servants of the state, while excluding them from Israel Jewish spaces. This dynamic weakens the young women participants and exacerbates their vulnerabilities. The state controls their economic lives and the local community controls their movement and daily lives. Furthermore, state racism has also leads to the construction of Israeli Jews as feared others in the Palestinian community. This fear is another motive for parental attempts

to prevent their daughters from traveling into Israeli Jewish spaces and instead containing them in their towns and cities. Othering and excluding Palestinians has strengthened patriarchal norms.<sup>75</sup> Living within a condition of patriarchal colonization and colonized patriarchy led the young women to look for spaces and tools of "freedom." They sought above all, and with compromised choices, to be independent, visible, and valuable.<sup>76</sup>

Being involved with the civic service enabled the young Palestinian women interviewed for this article to escape Israeli racism by working far away from it, and to escape their families' restrictions as well. As such, civic service could be considered a tool of resistance used by young women who have no other choices and alternatives to feel "free." Simultaneously, this escape is trapped because it still under the direct control of the state and the family.

Palestinian women used the available tools to resist, actively or passively, and to "maximize security and optimize life options." Kirin Narayan's notion of "shifting identities" is crucial here; women use these subjectivities to survive the oppressions of the colonizer and their family/society. The young women I interviewed aspired to forge their own spaces using the only work opportunity genuinely available to them. They utilized the state—which, in turn, utilized them—to attain a degree of economic independence, social visibility, and professional skills. The young women I interviewed served their communities and thereby strengthened their sense of Palestinian belonging. But they strengthened their Israeliness as well, even if unintentionally. In part, the young women became involved in the national-civic service as a refuge from parental authority. This subjective fluidity indicates women's power to survive both oppressive systems. Nevertheless, their "game" and choice also empowered both forms of state and family domination, making them unwitting partners in their own oppression. The pattern of the partners in their own oppression.

The national-civic service does not actually manage to liberate young women. To paraphrase Lila Abu-Lughod: do Palestinian women really need saving?<sup>80</sup> In ways resonant with Abu-Lughod's analysis of Afghan women, the Israeli state and its ongoing colonizing project will never liberate its colonized "servants" or the excluded "other" woman. The state of Israel, as noted by Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian, uses a "grammar of rights," expressed by specific institutions and organizations—such as state laws, state agencies, and the family—to justify and conceal its oppression.<sup>81</sup> In the case of Israel's

national-civic service, a state agency intersects with the family. Together they intensify control over the daily lives of the young women.

Mediators, working with the state's institution, "drafted" young women using patriarchal discourse, which would much more effectively sway their recruits than Zionist discourse. In the case of the national-civic service, these mediators are frequently Palestinians who encourage enlistment. They include official staff of the program, men who direct their young female relatives toward the national-civic service, and managers in state-run institutions and heads of local councils. As part of the colonial condition, these mediators buttress state hegemony and strengthen state control over young women. Such intermediaries implement decisions made elsewhere in the state's colonial hierarchy. The relationship between these mediators and the state's decision-makers is interdependent; both sides equally require the relationship and one cannot be separated from the other. This collusion between colonial power and patriarchal power is mutually constitutive. Both sides exploit the position of young Palestinian women to maintain their powers.

The challenge facing civic and human rights organizations, and the Palestinian political leadership, is to find alternatives to national-civic service, alternatives capable of providing comparable returns for young women, alternatives that empower them and make them active agents in overcoming their role as servants of their "fathers" and their colonizers. Without building alternatives for young Palestinian women—such as persuading the private sector to improve working conditions—organizations that oppose the Israeli national-civic service cannot blame these young women for their involvement. Palestinian NGOs, including feminist organizations, must intensify their work on both social and economic fronts in order to dull the power of social patriarchy that feeds the colonial state. Challenging the edifice of social norms and patriarchy will give these young women a broader set of possibilities other than the stifling "trapped escape" they are presently subject to.

#### **ENDNOTES**

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- 1 Ten Israeli shekels are equal to 2.80 US dollars.
- 2 Interview, 12 February 2013.
- 3 Civic service, as opposed to civil service, is the best description of the voluntary nature of this work.
- 4 Nadim Rouhana, Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).
- 5 Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh and Isis Nusair, "Introduction," in Displaced at Home: Ethnicity and Gender Among Palestinians in Israel, eds. Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh and Isis Nusair (New York: State University of New York Press, 2010), 1-22; and Oren Yiftachel, "Epilogue: Studying Naqab/Negev Bedouins—Toward a Colonial Paradigm?" Hagar: Studies in Culture, Polity, and Identities 8, no. 2 (2008), 87.
- 6 On the Nakba as process and event, see among others: Ahmad Sa'di, "Catastrophe, Memory, and Identity: Al-Nakbah as a Component of Palestinian Identity," Israel Studies 7, no. 2 (2002), 175-198; Lila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad Sa'di, "Introduction: The Claims of Memory," in Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory, eds. Ahmad Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1-26; and Nour Masalha, The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory (London: Zed Books, 2012).
- 7 Among others, see Muhanned Mustafa, Palestinians in Israel and the National Service: Between Civilian Discourse and National Affiliation (Umm al-Fahm, Israel: Intellectual Forum Recent Research Center, 2006).
- 8 Sami Smooha and Zohar Lechtman, Civic Service for Arabs in Israel: 2009 Research Findings [Sherut Leumi Izrahi La-A'ravim Biyesrael-Memtsaeh Mahkar 2009] (Haifa, Israel: Haifa University Arab-Jewish Center, 2010) (in Hebrew). See also Nadia Helew and E'dan Haim, "The Civic Service Within the Arab Society in Israel," Strategic Update 17, no. 1 (2014), 49-59.
- 9 The pilot program was initiated by the Israeli government, represented by Prime Minister Ehud Barak. Maggie Bar-Tura and Nicole Fleischer, "National-Civic Service in Israel," Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 33, no. 4 (2004), 51-63.
- Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "The Grammar of Rights in Colonial Contexts: The Case of the Palestinian Women in Israel," Middle East Law and Governance 4 (2012), 106-51; and Rhoda Kanaaneh, Surrounded: Palestinian Soldiers in the Israeli Military (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).
- 11 Smooha and Lechtman, Civic Service.
- 12 Young Druze men are obligated to serve in the Israeli army, based on an agreement between the Druze leadership and the new state of Israel in 1956. Druze opposition to this agreement began in 1956 and continues to the present. One of the most prominent Druze youth activist campaigns against military service is called "Urfud, Sha'bak Bi-Yihmik" (Refuse, Your People Will Protect You). Circassians must also serve, according to a similar agreement with the state signed in 1958. Bedouins, however, have the choice to serve or not to serve, and the number of volunteers declines every year, especially in the south, the Naqab area.
- 13 In an unplanned conversation on the issue, a Druze female student of mine explained to me in 2014: "Many Druze refuse to send their daughters to the civic service, not because of

- national reasons, as you know, but because they prefer her to stay at home and to protect her from open life and economic independence." Druze women's experience in the Israeli civic service warrants a special research study.
- 14 This research was conducted before the new law of 2014. Parts of the terms of service, such as the hours and years of service, are different and will be detailed later in the findings.
- 15 Israeli Law Book, no. 2442 (19 March 2014), 380-98.
- 16 Ibid., 384.
- 17 See Authority for National-Civic Service, http://ncs.gov.il/ncs/Information/ ConferencesAndEvents/Pages/knesset-serving-law.aspx, accessed 2 April 2017.
- Oriana Almasi, The National-Civic Service in Israel [Hasherut Haleumi-Izrahi Biyasrael] (Jerusalem: Research and Information Center of the Israeli Knesset, 2014), 4.
- 19 Mtannes Shihadeh, "National-Civic Service for Political Goals," in *The Palestinians in Israel and the Civic Service Plan: Preliminary Readings* [Al-Filastiniyyun fi Isra'il wa Mashru' al-Khidma al-Madaniyya] ed. Mtanes Shihadeh (Haifa, Israel: Mada al-Carmel, 2014), 13-28 (in Arabic).
- 20 Muhanned Mustafa, Palestinians in Israel and the National Service: Between Civilian Discourse and National Affiliation (Umm al-Fahm, Israel: Intellectual Forum Recent Research Center, 2006).
- 21 A'nat Shalev, "Numbers of Arabs in the National Service Have Doubled: 'They Can Say Traitor, So What?" Ynet, 1 January 2010, http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3828137,00. html.
- 22 Smooha and Lechtman, Civic Service.
- 23 A'as Atrash, "Palestinian Youths' Attitudes Toward the Israeli Civic Service," in Shihadeh, The Palestinians in Israel and the National-Civic Service Plan, 13-28.
- 24 Among other direct confrontations between the Palestinians and the Israeli state, highly important ones are the Kafr Qasim slaughter in 1956, the 1976 Land Day uprising, and several demonstrations between 2012 and 2015 against land expropriation in the Naqab.
- 25 Mustafa, Palestinians in Israel and the National Service, 16.
- 26 Ibid., 24
- 27 Shihadeh, The Palestinians in Israel and the National-Civic Service Plan, 17.
- 28 Amal Jamal, Arab Minority Nationalism in Israel: The Politics of Indigeneity (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 270.
- 29 Kanaaneh, Surrounded, 31.
- 30 Shihadeh, The National-Civic Service Plan, 135-36.
- 31 Raef Zreik, "The Political Discourse Between the Demand of a State for All Its Citizens and Canceling the National-Civic Service," in Shihadeh, *The Palestinians In Israel and the* National-Civic Service Plan, 177-211.
- 32 The first demolition of a Druze home took place on 20 November 2016, in the village of Horfesh. On 24 January 2017, a large demonstration took place in the village of Mghar against home demolitions in the Druze community. For more see http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.767330, accessed 18 August 2017.
- 33 Ahmad Khatib and Ilan Biton, The National-Civic Service in Israel: Review and Analyses [Hasherut Haleumi-Izrahi Biyasrael: Skirah Venituwwah] (Jerusalem: Research and Information Center of the Israeli Knesset, 2011), 3.
- 34 See Smooha and Lechtman, Civic Service, 3; and Khatib and Biton, The National-Civic Service.
- 35 Smooha and Lechtman, National-Civic Service, iii.
- 36 Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "The Grammar of Rights," 117.

- 37 See Knesset report 2014, http://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/Info/MMMSummaries19/ Women\_2.pdf, 4-6 (in Hebrew). Accessed 25 August 2017.
- 38 Mtanes Shihadeh and Fuad Moadi, The Education Budget and Participation of Arab Women in the Labor Market in Israel: An Analysis of Gender and Ethnicity (Shfa'amer, Israel: Galilee Society, 2011); and Sawsan Touma-Shukha, Women and Employment (Nazareth, Israel: Women Against Violence, 2007).
- 39 Status of Palestinian Women in Israel, a report prepared by several Palestinian civil society associations and institutions, presented to the Knesset Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Israel, 2010), 4, 14.
- 40 Among others, see Vered Kraus, Secondary Breadwinners: Israeli Women in the Labor Force (London: Praeger, 2002); Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "Racism, Militarization, and Policing: Police Reactions to Violence Against Palestinian Women in Israel," Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture 10 (2004), 171-93; and Amalia Sa'ar, "Contradictory Location: Assessing the Position of Palestinian Women Citizens of Israel," Journal of Middle East Studies 3, no. 3 (2007), 45-74.
- 41 On the history and present-day activism of feminist and women's rights organizations in Palestine, see Janan Abdu, *Palestinian Women's and Feminist Associations in the 1948 Areas* [al-Jam'iyyat al-Nisa'iyya wa al-Nisawiyya al-Filastiniyya fi Manatiq al-48] (Haifa, Israel: Mada al-Carmel Center, 2008) (in Arabic).
- 42 Shihadeh and Moadi, The Education Budget; Khawla Abu Baker, "Career Women' or 'Working Women'? Change Versus Stability for Young Palestinian Women in Israel," Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture 21 (2002), 85-109; and Mohammad Amara, "Integrating Arab Women into the Labor Force: Applied Research as a Basis for Innovative Solutions," Dirasat Yearbook [Kitab Dirasat] 5 (2012), 22-31.
- 43 Farid Abu Zayna, Marwan al-Ibrahim, 'Abd al-Rahman 'Adas, 'Amir Qandaliji, and Khalil Alayan, *Curricula of Scientific Research: Ways of Qualitative Research* [Manahij al-Bahth al-'Ilmi: Turuq al-Bahth al-Naw'i], second edition (Amman: Al-Maseera House for Distribution and Publication, 2007) (in Arabic).
- 44 The "Triangle" area includes twenty-nine Palestinian cities and villages, distributed between the northern area of it and the southern area. The northern area of the "Triangle" includes Wadi 'Ara.
- 45 To protect interviewees' privacy, I have used pseudonyms and do not mention places of residence.
- 46 It is important to mention here that none of the interviewees were my students.
- 47 Interview, 27 February 2013.
- 48 Interview, 14 January 2013.
- 49 Interview, 28 November 2012.
- 50 According to Israeli law, parents with Israeli identity cards receive a small monthly allowance from the state for each child until s/he reaches the age of eighteen.
- 51 Interview, 3 December 2012.
- 52 Some of the parents refused to let their daughters participate in the national-civic service for reasons other than it serving the Israeli state—the nationalist reason. The patriarchal reason refers to parents' a priori refusal that their daughters work at all by virtue of their gender.
- 53 Interview, 19 December 2012.
- 54 Interview, 30 January 2013.
- 55 Interview, 23 January 2013.
- 56 Interview, 7 February 2013.
- 57 Until 2014, when the new law was released, the volunteers could choose to volunteer for

- one or two years. The amount of benefits they received at the end depended on length of service. The young women participated in this study served before the new law of 2014.
- 58 Interview, 30 January 2013.
- 59 Each educational or/and health institute in the Palestinian villages/cities affiliated with the state government must provide opportunities for youth to do national-civic service, even if their staff may not agree due to political attitudes.
- 60 Interview, 18 March 2013.
- 61 The government schools within the Palestinian cities and villages in Israel are affiliated with the Israeli Ministry of Education, where civic service is considered social service. Interview, 19 December 2012.
- 62 Interview, 27 February 2013.
- 63 The father used the Arabic word *haram*, which means "forbidden" or "proscribed by Islamic law."
- 64 Interview, 28 November 2012.
- 65 Interview, 20 November 2012.
- 66 Interview, 18 March 2013.
- 67 Interview, 24 December 2012.
- 68 Interview, 21 February 2013.
- 69 These conditions were relevant to the research period. The number of work hours changed in the new law of 2014, mentioned above.
- 70 Interview, 19 December 2012.
- 71 Two of the interviewees served in institutes in Jewish cities and not in their own town or other Palestinian locale.
- 72 See Kananeh, 3.
- 73 Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 74 Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "The Grammar of Rights."
- 75 For example, when a Palestinian woman is killed or experiences any kind of violence inside her community, the whole Israeli legal process is managed on the basis of "cultural" differences as opposed to the state's responsibility to protect the woman as a civilian subject to its law.
- 76 I do not aim to equate the patriarchal and colonial systems; each has its history, structure, and apparatuses. The issue is how they collaborate in oppressing women in their daily lives, movement, and economic opportunity.
- 77 Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining With Patriarchy," Gender and Society 2, no. 3 (1988), 274-75.
- 78 Kirin Narayan, "How Native is a 'Native' Anthropologist?" *American Anthropologist* 95, no. 3 (1993), 671-86.
- 79 Ziad Abu 'Amr, Civic Society and Democratic Transformation in Palestine [al-Mujtama' al-Madani wa al-Tahawwul al-Dimuqrati fi Filastin] (Ramallah: Muwatin, 1995) (in Arabic).
- 80 Lila Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," American Anthropologist 104, no. 3 (2002), 788.
- 81 Shalhoub-Kevorkian, "The Grammar of Rights."
- 82 Albert Memmi, The Colonizer and the Colonized (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).
- 83 Ibid., 5.