

Tal'at: a feminist movement that is redefining liberation and reimagining Palestine

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“There is no free homeland without free women” reverberated across Palestinian communities last September when thousands of Palestinian women took to the streets in 12 villages, towns and cities across the world in what was the launch of Tal'at, a Palestinian feminist movement. Tal'at means stepping out in Arabic.

Choosing the streets as their space of struggle, marchers raised their voices against gender-based violence in all its manifestations: femicide, domestic violence, embedded sexism and exploitation, asserting that the path to true liberation must embody the emancipation of each and every Palestinian, including women.

This was the first time in recent history that Palestinian women took action under an explicitly political and feminist banner. It has succeeded in mobilizing Palestinians across their fragmented geographies.

The catalyst was the killing of [Israa Ghrayeb](#), a 21-year-old Palestinian woman from Bethlehem. Israa was brutally beaten by family members in August 2019. They followed her to the hospital where they inflicted further and fatal injuries as a result of their unabated physical abuse. Israa's screams for rescue were documented by medical staff at the hospital and shared over social media. No one came to her rescue, even the person who documented her cry for help seemingly did not intervene. The sheer brutality of Israa's murder was underscored by what happened next. Direct institutional complicity from the hospital was coupled with social silencing from her family which spread accusatory rumors. They claimed that Israa was “possessed” and alleged she had mental health issues—as if that could justify their actions.

Israa was one of 34 Palestinian women killed in 2019 according to our data. Since the beginning of 2020, Shadia Abu Sreihan, 35-years from the Naqab (Negev) and Safa Shikshek, 25-years from Gaza, were taken from us by femicide.

Feeling the exigencies, two weeks after Israa's murder, a small group of Palestinian women issued a call to protest, urging women to stand up, raise their voices and take action: “This is a demonstration for Israa and the 28 women that we have lost since the beginning of the year, and for those whose bodies and souls face daily violence.”

Our message: the safety and dignity of women in Palestine is not a women-only issue, but one that must be at the core of our emancipatory politics in discourse and action, for there is no free homeland without free women.”

Why do Palestinian women feel the urgency to organize under an explicitly emancipatory feminist

banner? What is the feminist discourse that Tal'at embodies? We write in an attempt to address some of these questions.

Defying racist and orientalist stereotypes, women in the Middle East and North African region are at the forefront of the struggle for building a fairer, more equal and just society. As we write, women are occupying squares and marching through the streets of war-torn Iraq, determined to play an active role in shaping their future. In Lebanon, women have not left the streets, smashing banks, agitating for the rights of Syrian and Palestinian refugees, and giving us real-time schooling in revolutionary feminism in practice.

Feminists worldwide are embodying and articulating a feminism that sees oppression as systematic and structurally rooted in capitalism, intersecting with race, sexuality, colonialism, and environmentalism. In short, a feminism that goes beyond individual-gender-based demands, urging us to fight for a more just and equitable world for all.

Tal'at is part of this revolutionary feminist tradition. Our movement is shaped by our lived experience of more than seven decades of Israeli settler-colonial violence. As a people, we are stripped of our most basic rights and needs while crippling our collective development and resistance. This reality compels us to analyze experiences of violence – in their varied forms – as a social and political matter that must be dealt with at their root and collectively, as a society.

In addition to posing a direct threat to life and social reproduction, to further entrench its control, Israel has strategically worked to crush and fragment Palestinians socially, politically and economically. The stripping of Palestinian communities' collective agency, is coupled with the reinforcement of patriarchal kin unit structures. This is particularly acute in the case of Palestinians in Israel where a beneficiary relationship is developed between the government of Israel and heads of extended families, or sheiks. Among those rewards, the state grants these men the authority to handle what is considered as "intra-community" matters. Thus, for example, the [Israeli police have return runaway women](#) they suspect are being abused to their relatives and spouses, the very same people they were seeking refuge from.

This is not a call for institutional reform, but to deepen our understanding of the intertwined relationship between colonization and the manifestations of social oppression. Further, the police, as women worldwide know, is not our protector or ally; let alone when they form part of a colonial structure that engages with Palestinians as subjects that are to be surveilled and controlled; be it the Israeli police or the American trained Palestinian Authority police, with a [paramount role of policing Palestinians](#) in the interest of our colonizer.

An actuality which cannot be sidelined from this matrix of oppression, is the systematic crippling of Palestinian economic development and the engineering Palestinians, including women, into a cheap and exploitable workforce.

This all culminates in a multilayered system of violence where power relations, in their gendered, economic, social and political forms, are intensified and reproduced, directly impact on intra-community social formations.

In its initial call out, Tal'at called to seize the opportunity to build Palestinian, de-fragmented feminist solidarity. In this, Tal'at actively pushes against the tide of geographical, political and social fragmentation engulfing the Palestinian landscape, a process accelerated with the neoliberal-state-building process cemented by the Oslo Accords of 1993. Oslo narrowed the Palestinian liberation struggle around bureaucratic statehood and fragmented rights whilst carving a wedge between social and political struggles, further limiting our ability to articulate a broader vision of our

collective liberation.

The Palestinian political movement – in its multiple representations – continues to play an active role in sidelining and minimizing women’s emancipation as a women’s only-issue that ought to be articulated based on neo-liberal individual rights and within the confines of women’s nonprofits. Women’s safety and dignity are presented as a secondary struggle that ought to be postponed until after “geographical” liberation.

Tal’at evolved to change this reality by forcing emancipatory politics on the agenda, asserting that our liberation struggle must be based on centering the experiences of those socially, politically and economically marginalized and by practicing active solidarity with all those who endure the savagery of the current system.

We aspire to build a different world, for our emancipation is hinged on the shattering of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy all at once. Hence, Tal’at does not priorities making institutional demands, be it from the Palestinian Authority and definitely not the Israeli state; our struggle is an internal Palestinian one for the building of our social and political fabric, embarking on a process of radical collective healing, that informs our liberation struggle, in discourse and practice.

Tal’at marks a new dawn for the Palestinian feminist movement, where an independent-grassroots movement is trying to force a revolutionary feminist discourse on the agenda, redefining our national liberation struggle, to one that embodies the kind of society we want to build.

What the future holds for us is uncertain, but we know that bringing Palestinian women together under one umbrella, in a decentralized and also de-fragmented space of feminist-political activism, which creates conditions for growth and solidarity.

[Hala Marshood](#) is an activist in Tal’at and researchers with a focus on political economy.

[Riya Alsanah](#) is an activist in Tal’at and researchers with a focus on political economy.

Hala Marshood

Riya Alsanah

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