WOMEN IN SOCIETY A Feminist List edited by Jo Campling

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The 1970s and 1980s have seen an explosion of publishing by, about and for women. This new list is designed to make a particular contribution to this process by commissioning and publishing books which consolidate and advance feminist research and debate in key areas in a form suitable for students, academics and researchers but also accessible to a broader general readership.

As far as possible books will adopt an international perspective incorporating comparative material from a range of countries where this is illuminating. Above all they will be interdisciplinary, aiming to put women's studies and feminist discussion firmly on the agenda in subject-areas as disparate as law, physical education, art and social policy.

A list of published and forthcoming titles follows overleaf

Published

- Sheila Allen and Carol Wolkowitz **Homeworking: myths and realities**
Niamh Baker **Happily Ever After? Women's fiction in postwar Britain, 1945–60**
Jenny Beale **Women in Ireland: voices of change**
Jennifer Breen **In Her Own Write: twentieth-century women's fiction**
Ruth Carter and Gill Kirkup **Women in Engineering: a good place to be?**
Angela Coyle and Jane Skinner (editors) **Women and Work: positive action for change**
Gillian Dalley **Ideologies of Caring: rethinking community and collectivism**
Leonore Davidoff and Belinda Westover (editors) **Our Work, Our Lives, Our Words: women's history and women's work**
Emily Driver and Audrey Droisen (editors) **Child Sexual Abuse: feminist perspectives**
Lesley Ferris **Acting Women: images of women in theatre**
Diana Gittins **The Family in Question: changing households and familiar ideologies**
Tuula Gordon **Feminist Mothers**
Frances Heidensohn **Women and Crime**
Ursula King **Women and Spirituality: voices of protest and promise**
Muthoni Likimani (*Introductory Essay by Jean O' Barr*) **Passbook Number F.47927: women and Mau Mau in Kenya**
Jo Little, Linda Peake and Pat Richardson (editors) **Women in Cities: gender and the urban environment**
Sharon Macdonald, Pat Holden and Shirley Ardener (editors) **Images of Women in Peace and War: cross-cultural and historical perspectives**
Shelley Pennington and Belinda Westover **A Hidden Workforce: homeworkers in England, 1850–1985**
Vicky Randall **Women and Politics: an international perspective** (2nd edn)
Rosemary Ridd and Helen Callaway (editors) **Caught Up in Conflict: women's responses to political strife**
Patricia Spallone **Beyond Conception: the new politics of reproduction**
Taking Liberties Collective **Learning the Hard Way: women's oppression in men's education**
Clare Ungerson (editor) **Women and Social Policy: a reader**
Kitty Warnock **Land before Honour: Palestinian women in the Occupied Territories**
Annie Woodhouse **Fantastic Women: sex, gender and transvestism**

Forthcoming

- Christy Adair **Women and Dance**
Eileen Aird and Judy Lown **Education for Autonomy: processes of change in women's education**
Ros Ballaster *et al.* **Women's Worlds**
Maria Brenton **Women and Old Age**
Valerie Bryson **Feminist Political Theory**
Joan Busfield **Women and Mental Health**
Joan Chandler **Wives without Husbands**
Sheila Cunnison and Jane Stageman **Women and Trade Unions**
Betsy Ettore **Women and Substance Abuse**
Elizabeth Fallaize **Contemporary French Women's Fiction**
Lesley Ferris **Acting Women: images of women in theatre**
Frances Gray **Women and Laughter**
Eileen Green, Diana Woodward and Sandra Hebron **Women's Leisure, What Leisure?**
Jennifer Hargreaves **Women and Sport**
Annie Hudson **Troublesome Girls: adolescence, femininity and the state**
Susan Lonsdale **Women and Disability: the experience of physical disability among women**
Mavis Maclean **Surviving Divorce: women's resources after separation**
Lesley Rimmer **Women's Family Lives: changes and choices**
Susan Sellers **Language and Sexual Difference: feminist writing in France**
Jennie Somerville **Feminism and the Family**
Deborah Valenze **The Other Victorian Women**
Janet Wolff **The Art of Women**

Land before Honour

Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories

Kitty Warnock

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MACMILLAN

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KITTY WARNOCK

Preface

This book grew out of the four and a half years I spent living and working in the Palestinian West Bank under Israeli occupation. The germ of the book was a simple observation: the striking contrasts between the lives of many Palestinian mothers and those of their daughters. Women with no formal education whose lives have been bounded by family, fields and flocks, have daughters studying physics in the United States or dentistry in the Soviet Union. Mothers who without protest married their cousins at the age of thirteen now find themselves sustaining their daughters through years of bitter punishment in prison for resistance against Israeli occupation. Many who were brought up to believe women should be neither seen nor heard now accept the younger generation leading national organisations and holding responsible positions in public life. Within the space of a generation, the position of women and their perceptions of themselves have been transformed. Gradual change would have occurred even in peaceful circumstances, but for Palestinians the process has been intensified and accelerated by the tragic upheavals and pressures they have experienced throughout the twentieth century.

As soon as I began to look among my friends for mother-and-daughter pairs to illustrate a short article I was thinking of writing, the project mushroomed and took on a momentum of its own. Women of all ages, I found, were in a process of examining and assessing their lives. Individually and collectively they were seeking their identities, as women and as Palestinians. As women they have experienced oppression and deprivation within their families; as Palestinians, they have experienced national disasters and the loss of their inherited world, grief, poverty, humiliation and political tyranny. Now the values on which the older generation built their lives are being called into question by social and economic changes,

growing political and social awareness, and new opportunities for the young. Older women are having to seek anew the meaning and justification of their sufferings. Younger women are exploring how to take advantage of new possibilities, how to seize the initiative and create a new place for women in the future. All are eager to explain their lives, affirm their pride in their achievements, and seek support for their new demands.

As I went further, the experiences I was exploring began to appear increasingly complex. Why did a heroic political activist accept such narrow constraints on her social life? How did a poor and ill-treated peasant woman maintain such dignity and self-respect? How could one woman express in the same breath glowing nostalgia for the past and horror at its tyrannies? Or how could approval of the traditional subordination of women coexist with admiration for exceptional and heroic individuals?

For Palestinians, the intensity of many of these paradoxes can be attributed to their national history. This is what causes the combinations of acute suffering with courageous determination, of clinging attachment to the past with conscious commitment to building a future, of longing for individual fulfilment with sacrifice for the national cause. The situation of occupation and the Palestinian method of resistance, as many commentators have pointed out, invest the most private and domestic experiences with historic significance.

Palestinian women's view of themselves assumes that women's progress is so linked to the nation's progress that one cannot happen without the other. This assumption gives women a powerful sense of the significance of everything they do, and they are confident that they, and the Palestinian people as a whole, are progressing from the oppression and humiliations of the past and present to dignity and independence in the not too distant future.

Palestinians always offer hospitality to visitors, and a welcome to journalists and writers. I was privileged to have many contacts with a wide range of people all over the West Bank and Gaza Strip, through my students and their families, colleagues, neighbours, friends, and the women's committees. I had plenty of time to follow up these introductions, because Birzeit University, where I was teaching, was closed by the Israeli military authorities for months at a time every year of my stay. I was able to interview over fifty women at length, sometimes for whole days, sometimes on several

separate occasions. I tried to find women who had lived in particular circumstances or had particular types of experience; but of course chance and personal inclination dictated the final selection of women I met, and though I do not think most of them were unusual, I would not claim that they are 'representative' of more than themselves.

I was engaged with the personal story, the specificity of the experience, of each woman I interviewed. Much of the individual interest and drama of individuals' lives and self-representations, with all their contradictions and accidents, has inevitably been lost in turning the interviews into a book which tries to lay out themes and issues along general lines. I hope I have not distorted, simplified and interpreted too much. I have tried to describe a starting point in time, quite arbitrarily taken as corresponding with the earliest memories of the women I met, and from there to trace economic and social changes through individual interviews. Women's resistance activity and its impact on their social status, and the organised women's movement have been treated in separate chapters.

Some readers will feel that I have devoted too little space to the subject of daily life under occupation and its particular pressure on women. Whole books could be written cataloguing the tedious litany of the Israeli authorities' behaviour towards Palestinians – brutality and racist arrogance, hypocrisy, Kafkaesque administrative traps and travesties of justice – and the humiliation, grief and anger (but hardly ever despair) that Palestinians suffer.

I was not concerned primarily with politics, and am certainly not intending to plead for the Palestinian cause: the reader will soon see that I take for granted Palestinians' right to national self-determination and to the establishment of some reasonably just way of living with Israelis. Nor was I attempting a serious study of women's role in the Palestinian national movement and resistance, though this is a subject of great interest. As it happened, during the years I was in the West Bank (1981–6) the political initiative was held by Palestinians in exile, and resistance in the occupied territories was of secondary importance. It was the period of Israel's most serious invasion of Lebanon (June 1982), the massacres of Sabra and Shatila (September 1982), the subsequent divisions and difficulties as the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) struggled to re-establish some substance and leverage in inter-

national affairs after its evacuation from Beirut. The *intifada*, the uprising in which Palestinians in the occupied territories made the world listen to them and put Israel on the defensive, began two years after I left.

A Palestinian woman would have written a different book from mine, but I do not think that being a foreigner was entirely a disadvantage. My original idea, impressionistic and rather 'picturesque', was a foreigner's idea and would not perhaps have struck a Palestinian as interesting. Once I had got beyond it, the distance between me and the interviewees was probably not much more than would have been the case for a Palestinian if she was an urban bourgeois woman, or one who had been educated abroad.

At first I did wonder sometimes whether I was being treated to some sort of instinctive propaganda display put on for foreigners. I could not believe that so many women would accept the sufferings of defeat, dispersal and occupation with so much strength and pride, sustained for so many years only by their conviction of the justice of their cause. But I realised that their defiance was real: there is a communal language of images, attitudes and phrases, which supports individuals in their sufferings, turns their private grief to public strength, and is a powerful weapon of Palestinians' resistance. A Palestinian woman would have heard the same boasted readiness to suffer more, the same willingness to wait 'one hundred years or more' for justice.

I have been asked why I did not talk to Israeli women as well as Palestinians. This question comes from people who do not know the absolute separateness, physical and cultural, of the two communities. My answer is that, though there would be interesting links to be drawn between Jewish Israeli women and Palestinian women inside Israel, there would be little point in making comparisons between them and Palestinians in the occupied territories. There is very little connection between the two peoples. This has been due partly to deliberate Israeli policy, partly to fear. Official Israeli government policy has been that the occupied territories are permanently part of Israel, but this has not resulted in attempts to integrate them except as economic dependencies. If one were writing about South Africa, dramatic contrasts could illuminate the way white people live directly on the backs of black people. But Israel's exploitation of the occupied territories is much less total and less direct; for the majority on both sides there is little contact.

It would be hard to say how much the social aspirations of Palestinian women may have been influenced by Israeli women, after the familiar pattern of the conquered adopting the culture of the conquerors. Palestinians do not consciously use Israeli society as a reference and model for themselves. It is sometimes said that Palestinian men who work inside Israel are influenced by what they see of the Israeli way of life; but this influence works both ways, reinforcing attachment to Palestinian tradition as much as showing an attractive alternative. For most Palestinian women, the only Israelis they ever meet are the soldiers who come to threaten and intimidate them. Palestinian women looking for models of a progressive liberated life are more likely to look towards Jordan, Egypt and the Gulf countries, or to Eastern and Western Europe and the United States. But they do not need outside models to define their aspirations. From their own experiences they know that they want much the same things as other people do: education, work, happy marriages, freedom from social constraints, the power to contribute to their people's development and political progress, and the right to bring up their families free from fear and oppression.

Glossary of Arabic words used in the text

<i>abu</i>	Father.
<i>dabke</i>	Traditional Palestinian dance.
<i>daya</i>	Traditional midwife.
<i>dinar</i>	Jordanian currency unit, equivalent at the time of the interviews to approximately £2.00 sterling. It has continued in use in the West Bank during the occupation because it has been a much more stable currency than the Israeli shekel, and many Palestinian institutions and businesses have had their banking facilities in Amman, Jordan.
<i>feda'i, feda'iye (f.),</i> <i>feda'iin (m. pl.)</i>	Guerrilla, freedom fighter.
<i>hamouleh,</i> <i>hamayel (pl.)</i>	Often translated as tribe or clan, the word has no exact equivalent in English. A hamouleh is a patrilineal, patriarchal group of families claiming descent from a common ancestor, sometimes a century ago, sometimes more.
<i>haram</i>	Forbidden, improper (of behaviour).
<i>'iib</i>	Shame; something which is forbidden by religion or by custom and the honour code.
<i>imam</i>	Religious official, whose duties include leading prayers, preaching, and marriage ceremonies.
<i>intifada</i>	Uprising (literally, shaking up). The name given to the uprising in the occupied territories which began in December 1987.
<i>jilbaab</i>	A long, long-sleeved unbelted dress for men or women. The word is often used to refer to the

	new type of overdress worn by women followers of the Islamic revival, which is made from a plain and sober-coloured fabric.
<i>kefiyye</i>	A checked men's headscarf. Always worn by Yaser Arafat, the <i>kefiyye</i> has become a symbol of the Palestinian nation, though it is also worn by men in some other Arab countries.
<i>khabī</i>	A bin which used to be built of mud and straw for storing grain indoors.
<i>kiswe</i>	Gifts traditionally given as part of wedding preparations by the groom to the family of the bride; often clothes or lengths of cloth.
<i>mahr</i>	Dower, bride-price. The gift given to the family of the bride by the family of the groom. The amount of <i>mahr</i> to be paid at the time of the wedding and the amount of deferred <i>mahr</i> to be paid by the husband to the wife if he divorces her are agreed when the marriage is arranged and specified in the marriage contract. Jordanian law lays down that without a minimum <i>mahr</i> of one dinar, a marriage is not legal.
<i>mukhtar</i>	Administrative official in a village, appointed by the government to register births, land deals, and so on. The office was created by the Ottoman government in the nineteenth century as part of its drive to improve the efficiency of the administration of the empire.
<i>sumud</i>	Steadfastness. The political tactic of resisting the Israeli occupation by bearing all its oppressive tactics with fortitude, and refusing to leave the occupied territories in search of an easier life and better opportunities elsewhere.
<i>ta'boun</i>	Traditional outdoor oven for baking bread, built of mud or stone. The fuel is wood, brush or dried dung, and the flat bread is cooked on hot stones. Often several neighbouring households share a <i>ta'boun</i> , which becomes a meeting-place for women. Many Palestinian village women still bake in a <i>ta'boun</i> , although bought bread and electric ovens are increasingly available.

xiv *Glossary of Arabic Words*

tawjihi

High-school graduation examinations.

thoob

Long, long-sleeved dress. The *thoob* is the traditional everyday dress of Palestinian women in the centre and south of the country, usually made of black or dark-blue fabric and embroidered with elaborate cross-stitch designs on the chest, hem and in bands up the skirt. In the past, each region had its own style and designs of embroidery, but now the designs are more universal. Many women still wear a *thoob* every day; others keep them for going out and special occasions and have simpler dresses of printed man-made fabric for everyday wear at home. Embroidering *thoobs* is one of the principal leisure activities of many village women. The man's *thoob*, a plain long robe, is still worn by a few older men, but most men, including all the younger generation, prefer Western dress. (Note: for simplicity I have used an English form of plural, *thoobs*, instead of the Arabic plural, *athwaab*.)

umm

Mother.

Map of Historical Palestine*

*Showing places mentioned in the text.

Sources: drawn by the author; outline and principal towns taken from a map provided by UNRWA (UN Refugee and Works Agency); smaller villages added by the author from an Israeli government *Survey of Israel* map, 1982.