

Book reviews

Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *Palestinian Women: Patriarchy and Resistance in The West Bank* (Lynne Reiner, Boulder and London, 2001), 318 pp.

In her study, Cheryl Rubenberg focuses on a specific community of research in the West Bank: Palestinian women who live in refugee camps and in villages. Listening to their voices and examining their life experiences brought the author to the understanding that the core of gender inequality in this society resides in patriarchal control and repression of female sexuality. Gender inequality and control of the female sexuality construct serve a political and economic purpose, maintaining male power, privileges and prerogatives. Marriage, a central mechanism of male control, guarantees perpetuation of the patriline by producing sons or male heirs. The way in which marriage is arranged facilitates male governorship of the exchange and male control over the transfer of wealth and property. This, in turn, prefigures and conditions the persistence of male dominance in all other institutions, which effectively designs the reproduction of patriarchy.

According to Rubenberg, the life experiences of the women in the research community have been shaped for the last 60 years by the inability of the men to demonstrate other important aspects of the traditional, highly valued male honor code. As they have lost land and property as a result of the Naqba, and later on the 1967 war, it has become impossible for them to exercise many aspects of this honor code independence, assertiveness, autonomy, generosity or any other honorable trait. This has resulted in the repression of women's sexuality, which has become significant for validation of the code of honor. Indeed, the control of women has become the only component of the honor code left to men.

Examining these constructs within the context of the Israeli occupation, Rubenberg reveals an enormous deleterious effect on gender roles and relations, as well as on women's life situations in general. With the destruction of agriculture and the prohibition of industrial development over the years, the occupation has led males to migrate to foreign countries in search of employment and decent wages. This, together with the massive subjection of those men who remain to shootings, killings, arrests and imprisonment, has greatly increased the number of female-headed households. In addition, the perpetuation of underdevelopment in the West Bank, combined with its total closure of the territories after 1993, has resulted in large-scale, growing misery,

especially in the refugee camps and villages. Israel's control of all water resources and its restrictions on the development of health and educational facilities are largely responsible for the substandard quality of health care, as well as for many of the problems in the educational system. These factors have been injurious to women's health. The viability of women's pregnancy has been constantly at risk. This is exacerbated by the interdiction of access to existing health-care facilities through roadblocks and closures.

All these repressing factors have forced families to limit their daughters' life choices in a variety of ways. Soldiers have manipulated women's fears of being accused of damaging the honor of their family, leading to increased female immurement, early school dropouts, early marriage and further impediments to women's freedom of movement. Perhaps the most devastating effect on women's life and family life is Israel's policy of house demolition. Ultimately, the occupation has reinforced the traditional patriarchal family and women's dependence and subjugation.

Rubenberg points out that globalization trends have significantly contributed to the impoverishment of women's lives in West Bank camps and villages. She also relates the impoverishment to international economic and political power dynamics and the policies of international financial institutions, especially the strings they attach to financial contributions to local NGOs. The West Bank is deeply affected by wildly growing global competition, and this is reflected in undisciplined worldwide capitalism. The dominance of the United States, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank have resulted in a deepening of social inequality. Simultaneously, authoritarianism of the PA is increasing. These trends at the societal level replicate trends in the family and other local institutions. NGOs rely on foreign funding and a concomitant need to devise development-oriented programs, but these programs do not meet the needs of the women in the camps and villages.

The author found indigenous efforts to bring change to the women's lives in two feminist initiatives: the Muslim Sisters and the Women's Center in Al-Am'ari. These initiatives are grassroots movements aimed at generating transformation. But the impoverishment and traditional family life continue to hinder changes within the family, blocking a social and economic process that could give women the opportunity to obtain more education, find work, marry later and have fewer children. The author's insight in this respect is that these efforts may not succeed because of the strong ties of the *hamula* (clan), the religious *shari'a* (Muslim religious law), and the Israeli occupation policy, all of which deprive the women of their basic human rights.

The author ends her research with the wish that future studies look at patriarchy not only as a system that oppresses women, but also as one that fixes men in hierarchical relations of domination and subordination. During her research, as she perceived patterns of submission to authority and severe limits on men's individual life choices, she came to the understanding that the study should continue in this direction. Although the questions that need to be examined as forces that oppress

men differ than those asked when studying the forces that subordinate women, these forces affect the same aspects of social and family life. For example, men are forced to leave school early to help support their families. Their wives are most often chosen for them. They are forced to subordinate themselves to their parents' will. Men in the research community, the author concludes, are no more liberated than women. Thus, it is clear that women cannot expect to be freed if men remain shackled to patriarchal hierarchies and obligations. This last position, as the author has presented it, left me with questioning thoughts, as I am not entirely convinced that women's liberation is dependent on men's liberation, although the two may be connected.

The book remains in the framework of traditional sociological research and feminist scholarship that engages in traditional objectives family, pregnancy, marriage, health and education and involves discussions of religion and gender. However, it lacks a cross-cultural perspective and looks at the research objectives from a Western perspective rather than a Middle Eastern one. The author admits that she cannot and will not tell the West Bank women how they should design their path to liberation. Consequently, the discourse of this study has limited itself in mapping the impact of the restrictions of Arab and Muslim tradition, as well as the Israeli occupation, in terms of oppression of these women's lives. The study provides us with a cultural fabric that evaluates the West Bank camp and village women from a missionary perspective. Women are presented as uncritical of the patriarchal, traditional or religious order, and rather as a female community that subjugates itself to male subordinators. From this perspective, the study implies that the situation is complicated not only immersed in the tension between traditional-modern patterns of conflict, but also caught in the Israeli occupation web but does so in a way that reifies the women. Within this framework, the study provides us with a solid account of the life experiences of the West Bank camp and village women, but remains unreflexive of the Western gaze.

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Fred A. Lazin, *The Struggle for Soviet Jewry in American Politics: Israel versus the American Jewish Establishment* (Lexington Books, 2005), 356 pp.

The struggle over the right for Jews in the former Soviet Union to freely emigrate was one of the most prominently advocated issues during the Cold War. Rallies drawing tens of thousands were held across the United States; the U.S. Congress passed resolutions and laws designed to pressure the Soviets; and American presidents linked emigration rights to détente nuclear arms control treaties. The force behind this cause was the world Jewish community, led by a powerful American Jewish lobby.