This volume is a timely addition to the disturbingly slender body of academic research on Palestinian society during the current, ultra-violent phase of the Israeli military occupation. One may have assumed that the October 2000 disruption of the Palestinian attempt--short-lived and circumscribed as it was--at state-building, and the unprecedented upsurge of Israeli military aggression that followed thereafter, which carried in its wake devastation and destruction for all aspects of Palestinian social, economic, and political life in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, would have given rise to a large body of "crisis and disaster focused" social research and literature. Such an expectation was all the more apt if one took into consideration the wealth of social, political, and historical research that was triggered by the first Intifada (1987-93) and the diversity of scholars, in terms of both disciplinary specialization and nationality, who took part at that time in the enterprise of in-depth inquiry and knowledge production. But the more than seven years that have elapsed since the outbreak of the second Intifada (and Israel's first attempts to suppress it) in October 2000 appear to have yielded a very different scholarly reaction.

Certainly, one is overwhelmed by the volume, high quality, and comprehensiveness of crisis and catastrophe-centered research that has been (and is continuously being) carried out and published by a host of international and local organizations and agencies. These include a dozen or so UN organizations, first and foremost the Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), the World Bank, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) (an agency of the Palestinian Authority), a long list of international and Palestinian NGOs, and a number of Palestinian, Israeli, and international human rights organizations. Indeed, the abundance of data on poverty, declining standards of living, unemployment, labor market contraction, and other crises in the public and private sectors that is found in the periodical and annual reports by the aforementioned organizations is probably sufficient to sustain hundreds of research projects in the social sciences. However, it
is a distressing fact that the incorporation of this raw data and its partially processed findings into broader sociological, anthropological, and historical studies is lagging far behind.

*Living Palestine*, a collection of research essays that explore relatively recent trends in urban culture, marriage patterns, emigration and class formation, the organization of and changing relationships within family households, and women's economic participation in contemporary occupied Palestine is therefore a welcome contribution, if only for its capacity to supplement "facts and figures" with sociohistorical analysis. All six contributors to this volume, five female and one male, are West Bank-based Palestinian academics practicing various social science disciplines, including sociology (Jamil Hilal, Lisa Taraki, Eileen Kuttab), public health (Rita Giacaman), and gender studies (Lamis Abu Nahleh, Penny Johnson). Furthermore, all have previously written extensively on Palestinian society and politics in the Occupied Territories, some for nearly three decades. The five women contributors are all affiliated with Birzeit University, three with the Institute of Women's Studies (IWS), one with the Institute of Community and Public Health, and one with the Department of Sociology. The sixth contributor is a research fellow at the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy in Ramallah, who has also worked in collaboration with Birzeit's IWS.

In addition to the authors' shared institutional affiliation, another connecting link renders *Living Palestine* into a joint venture, rather than a mere collection of topically related articles. All of this volume's contributors relied heavily on the findings of a survey of two thousand Palestinian households in nineteen communities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip designed by the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University and conducted in the summer of 1999. The authors also made use of various publications of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), primarily statistical data compiled from the 1997 census and from annual surveys conducted from 1995 to 2000. Only two research essays relied extensively on fieldwork and relevant statistical data from more recent crises, that is, since 2001. This implies that, somewhat contrary to the initial impression its contents convey, this collection elaborates more upon developments of the 1990s than upon those of the post-Oslo years, a point to which I will return. In what follows I offer a critical reading of two essays in the collection: Lisa Taraki and Rita Giacaman's "Modernity Aborted and Reborn: Ways of Being Urban in Palestine," and "Living Together in a Nation of Fragments: Dynamics of Kin, Place and Nation" by Penny Johnson.

Taking as their starting point "the abrupt abortion [in 1948] of Palestine's urban modernity as embodied in the coastal cities of Jaffa and Haifa and in the inland city of Jerusalem" (p. 1), Lisa Taraki and Rita Giacaman set out to explore prototypes of urban history and of contemporary urban life in the West Bank, where the continuity, rather than the rupture, of communities prevailed. The authors' choice to focus on the cities of Nablus, Hebron, and Ramallah reflects an attempt on their part to encompass the marked diversity of urban development within this small part of historical Palestine. However, due to the relative scarcity of existing sociohistorical research on the three cities and the paucity of primary sources available to the authors, the reconstructed "city profiles" that emerge, while instructive, are based on considerable speculation and border on stereotypes. Thus Hebron and Ramallah are depicted as polar opposites, antipodes on the continuum of modernity and development. Hebron, the service and commercial center for Jabal al-Khalil, which retained attributes of a semi-rural town throughout the twentieth century, is characterized as the stronghold of traditionalism, conservatisms, localism, and narrow-mindedness. In contrast, Ramallah, currently the political and administrative "capital" of the Palestinian National Authority, is essentialized as the cosmopolitan home of stu-
dents, intellectuals, and professionals, as well as local and international NGOs.

And finally, Nablus, which has historically served as the region’s economic and cultural capital, and is home to a distinctive urban (yet “traditional”) elite that has long played a significant role in the Palestinian national movement, is afforded an intermediate position in the aforementioned hierarchy. Conspicuously absent from this typology, however, is an attempt to incorporate the impact of four decades of Israeli military occupation and the equally long period of resistance to that occupation in the framework of the Palestinian national movement. In other words, the single most significant factor contributing to occupied Palestine’s general economic, social and institutional underdevelopment, its arrested urban development, the consequent homogenization of socioeconomic conditions and reshaping of social structure, and the emergence and consolidation of political consciousness in this territory, was inexplicably left out of the analysis.

The absence of these key analytical determinants becomes all the more problematic in the second part of the essay, in which the authors use the reconstruction of their three historical profiles in an attempt to explain contemporary demographic and social characteristics of the three cities. To this end they mobilize a body of statistical data—most of which was extracted from the PCBS 1997 census—on fertility, marriage, education, employment, occupational differentiation, patterns of consumption, and other elements of lifestyle in the three urban areas and their corresponding rural districts. One salient finding that emerges from the abundance of data presented here and in other parts of this collection, is that, on the eve of the twenty-first century, the districts of Ramallah, Nablus, and Hebron exhibited relative similarity in terms of major socio-demographic indicators. These include an ever increasing rate of female enrollment in institutions of higher education, a significantly low rate of female participation in the labor force, a very high rate of kin marriages, a very low median age of women at the time of their first marriage, and a correspondingly high fertility rate. Another salient finding is that the city of Ramallah, at that time (1997) home to less than 20,000 residents, constituted a marked exception when compared to both its rural hinterland and to the other two cities. This was especially so in terms of Ramallah’s relatively high concentration of students, adults with post-secondary education, professionals, persons employed in medium and higher management, recent emigrants from other parts of Palestine and from the Diaspora, and households with private cars, computers, and other amenities.

However, rather than tracing the processes that yielded both the exception (Ramallah) and the rule (all other urban and semi-urban communities in the West Bank), the authors attribute contemporary socio-demographic disparities between the cities to distinct, immanent “social universes” (p. 31), “cultural universes” (p. 33), or “urban paradigms” (p. 40) that allegedly breed distinct value systems. Thus, the significantly higher percentage of adults with higher education in Ramallah is attributed to the great valorization of education by the Ramallawis as well as to their “modernist dispositions” (p. 48). Conversely, we are told that the slightly higher rates of child labor in Hebron and Nablus reflect the fact that “in Hebron and Nablus some sectors within the population appear to believe that their children can manage their lives without much education” (p. 37), and the greater prevalence of amenities in Ramallah households is deemed indicative of the distinctive “life agendas” adopted by particular individuals and/or families. One cannot escape the feeling that this essay was written as a song of praise for the Ramallah-based Palestinian middle class and the supposedly (post?) modernist “ethics” it upholds, a sociopolitical stand in marked contrast to the radical orientation that characterized Palestinian social science just two
decades ago. However, my main problem is rather with analysis that reproduces Ramallah, Hebron, and Nablus as self-contained entities divorced from the political economy of the Israeli occupation as well as from Palestinian politics. One is tempted to ask if, as is claimed, Ramallah is a "cultural universe" of its own, how do we explain the results of the parliamentary (PLC) elections of 2006, which demonstrated the fact that popular support for Hamas did not stop at the gates of this city? And what sense do we make of the fact that, for many years, the student movement at Birzeit University, perhaps "the" symbol of the "Ramallawi spirit," has been dominated, in whole or in part, by factions affiliated with Islamist political parties?

Researched and written by Penny Johnson, the second essay in the collection attempts to explain the persistence and pervasiveness of endogamy (marriage inside the kinship group, or kin-marriage, as it is termed here) in the Occupied Territories in the face of the profound social and political transformations that Palestinian society underwent during its prolonged subjection to Israeli military occupation. The high incidence and marked stability of endogamy are revealed in the ample statistical data that Johnson presents, and which are worth dwelling upon at some length. I will confine my remarks to the most salient data items: according to the IWS survey, in 1999 the prevalence of marriage between first cousins—the form of marriage to which the highest cultural preference is accorded—among women who had ever been married stood at 21 percent in the northern West Bank, 26 percent in the central West Bank, 27 percent in the southern West Bank, 30 percent in the Gaza Strip, and 32 percent in Jerusalem, with the cross-regional average standing at 27 percent. A PCBS survey taken in 2000 yielded comparable results, and found that an additional 19.3 to 21 percent of women who had ever been married were in fact married to more distant relatives (distant cousins from the same hamula). Most importantly, the data revealed that the prevalence of first cousin marriage bore little relation to classic indicators like age, urban vs. rural residency, locality, or educational level (pp. 67-68). Of further interest is the wide gap between parents' declared preferences with respect to marriage partners for their children and actual practice. Parents of prospective brides and grooms commonly express negative views about marriage to relatives, occasionally employing a "modernist discourse" of genetics for that purpose. Yet, more often than not, they end up marrying off their daughters and sons to close or distant cousins.

As Johnson acknowledges, a prevalence of kin marriage is not unique to Palestinian society. It is, in fact, rather common in all contemporary Arab societies, with the incidence of first cousin marriage in the 1990s reaching 24 percent in Egypt, 31 percent in Saudi Arabia, 35 percent in Syria, and 43 percent in Libya (p. 66). Moreover, endogamy is, alongside patrilocality, patrilineality, and patriarchy, among the cultural practices and structural features that have received the most scholarly attention from anthropologists, sociologists, and social historians. Scholars have offered varying explanations for endogamy's historical origins, its social, economic and cultural "functions," its interaction with other components of the sociopolitical system, and the reasons for its persistence against a backdrop of changing socioeconomic conditions. However, there is a broad scholarly consensus that endogamy is an embodiment of patriarchal control exercised by older male members of the family (and the broader kinship group) over young, unmarried family members, particularly unmarried females.[1] It is because of this linkage that the high incidence of endogamy is commonly employed as an indicator of social conservatism as well as of the lower social status of women in a given society. Conversely, the apparent aim of Johnson's analysis is to free endogamy from its interconnection with patriarchy, at least as far as the contemporary practice of kin marriage in occupied Palestine is concerned. Indeed,
nowhere in the text does Johnson note the ways in which endogamy, as a particular form of family-arranged marriage, enacts and reproduces patriarchal relationships within the families of the (hundreds of thousands of) Palestinian women whose experiences are the basis of the data she utilizes. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Johnson eschews explanatory schemes that indicate connections between the persistence of endogamy, the preservation of property relations, the reinforcement of social conservatism, and the repression of women.

Rather, Johnson selectively employs the theoretical apparatus of Pierre Bourdieu, particularly his concept of "economies of symbolic goods" and his conceptualization of kin and family relations as a relatively autonomous sphere, one not explicitly determined by the economic and political structures within which it is embedded. Thus armed, she asserts that "everyday practices of marriage and 'kin work' are sites where Israeli colonialism is contested and identity is constituted" (p. 52). The main thrust of Johnson's argument is that marriage between relatives (and occasionally, between unrelated members of the same community) is a means by which Palestinian families and the individuals they comprise fulfill essential social and emotional needs that they have been consistently denied, first by the Israeli occupation regime, and subsequently by the failure of the PNA to restore basic services or otherwise alleviate the devastating consequences of the siege and fragmentation that Israel imposes. In communities where permanent insecurity reigns, where people's ability to work and make a living, stay on their land, access health care, and travel is frequently disrupted or denied altogether, the persistence of endogamy indicates the importance that people accord to "closeness." In other words, it is their acknowledgement that, especially during periods of social instability, the similarity, indeed the "familiarity" or even "sameness" shared by prospective spouses is deemed a most valuable social asset (pp. 76-77). In short, Johnson interprets "the dynamics of sameness in marriage" (p. 87) as a means by which parents seek to protect their children and improve the latter's future prospects, a process yielding enhanced social solidarity and greater empowerment of the individuals involved.

In the absence of a modern state and the entitlements and services that such sovereign entities regularly confer, one is likely to find increased dependence on the family and other kinship ties for security, stability, and other forms of support. This is doubly true under the conditions wrought by military occupation. Moreover, a rich and varied body of ethnographic research conducted in the occupied Palestinian territories, including my own work and Lamis Abu Nahleh's contribution to this volume, provides us with analysis of household economies and other "mechanisms" that enable families to survive prolonged crises like severe, chronic poverty, irregular income patterns, and the multitude of daily pressures caused by the occupation.[2] However, along with the crucial support it provides, greater reliance on family and kinship ties usually entails increased subjection of individuals, particularly young, unmarried women, to patriarchal control. It is in this context, I believe, that one should interpret evidence documenting the persistence of kin marriage in occupied Palestine. Specifically, the fact that such a significant number of Palestinian parents continue to arrange their children's marriages is an indication of the low place young, unmarried men and women occupy in the hierarchies of their families and the larger society.

In the history of the Palestinian national movement "social agendas" always lagged far behind the national issue. Nonetheless, until quite recently, the secular organizations that constituted the national movement in the Occupied Territories, particularly the leftist organizations and their affiliated women's committees, considered themselves progressive alternatives to conservative, reactionary social forces and institutions, in-
cluding the patriarchal family. This position found natural expression in the critical attitude that political activists adopted to kin marriage, an issue to which I became exposed during my field research in the Dheisheh refugee camp (between 1992 and 1996). The parents of young male and female activists often attempted to arrange their children's marriages to first cousins or more distant relatives. Many resisted such attempts and mobilized "organizational resources" to that end: senior members of organizations repeatedly assumed intermediary roles, intervening on behalf of junior activists in an effort to call off arranged marriages or obtain parents' approval of their children's marriage choices. Resistance to the occupation was thus coupled, even if only to a modest degree, with resistance to the family's patriarchal control over its young members.

The Palestinian political arena has changed profoundly since the early 1990s. Popular political structures have all but evaporated, as has the power of leftist parties and organizations. Women's political committees have either been dissolved or supplanted by NGOs, and what remains of the secular national movement faces fierce competition from Islamist organizations. Hardly any political formation challenges the traditional family's authority, while rising religious forces champion traditional values and institutions. This retrogression is another factor explaining the persistence and prevalence of kin marriage in the Occupied Territories.

Notes


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