



## *Immigrant Palestinian Women Evaluate Their Lives*

*T*his study describes immigrant Palestinian women's assessments of the quality of their own lives as women, in general, and as Palestinian women, in particular. It is based on extensive fieldwork done in Chicago's Palestinian community, which resulted in detailed life histories of twenty-two women. The quotes used are from these life histories.

As with all human beings, the women in this study have based the assessment of the quality of their own lives on the values they hold, their sense of history, what they believe to be desirable and possible achievements, and the ways in which their lives compare to the lives of those they see around them. In making this later comparison the immigrant Palestinian women of this study compared their lives specifically to those of: 1. people who have a country; 2. their mothers; 3. Palestinian men; and 4. Western women, especially American women.

The result was a remarkable consensus, despite differences in socioeconomic status, marital status, place of origin, occupation, time of immigration, educational level, and subgroup membership. This is not to say that there were no differences of outlook and values. There were differences in the way women of different backgrounds described their values as well as individual differences not systematically related to differences in background characteristics. But, overall, there was more consensus than disparity. This consensus appears to result from a shared common social position, one that influences their perspective and judgments—they are all

Palestinian *women* and, as such, they share a common national and cultural background and a common status. They judge their lives and those of other Palestinian women from a perspective grounded in these realities. A perspective that sees their being immigrants as insignificant and their being Palestinian and stateless as overwhelmingly significant.

And so the women of this study feel that, on balance, they are no worse off than are other women, except for their statelessness. In fact, they feel that, in many ways, their lives are better than those of American women; a belief that may surprise those who view the lives of Arab women as unsatisfactory lives of submission and powerlessness. This disparity in judgment is explained by the difference in outlook; one based on a cultural perspective, the other focused on individual power and self-actualization. Given this cultural perspective, it is not surprising that the women of this study attribute many of their discontents to Palestinian statelessness rather than to gender inequality. If only they were in the Middle East, they say, life would be better. If only their country could be liberated, they could return to the society in which their lives would be better—a society in which the level of inequality between men and women would be substantially reduced from what it is in exile in the United States. It also is not surprising that the women who most long to return to the Middle East are those whose lives are guided most by Palestinian cultural norms. These women describe living a Palestinian life in the United States as unrewarding and unfulfilling.

### *Background Assumptions*

Almost universally, Palestinians, women and men, believe that males and females, *by nature*, are biologically and psychologically different; that they have different, although complementary, roles in life; and that gender differences in rights and duties are inevitable. This assumption, held in common by all immigrant life-history respondents, clearly influences the perspectives they have on life. The “fact” of these gender differences is perceived as limiting the possibilities of what can be. These assumptions do not inherently imply anything about superiority and inferiority, just difference. Assumptions about the natural, complementary differences between genders lie at the core of the organization of Arab hierarchical social structure and the division of labor in Arab society.

The effect of these assumptions on evaluations of the quality of life of Palestinian women is exemplified by responses to the question, "What do you think of what Western women call women's liberation?" Only one respondent said that she supported women's liberation unequivocally and only one respondent was completely against it. The remaining twenty supported the notion of women's liberation with certain reservations, the primary one being that "women are women" and should not try to be like men. This opinion is expressed in the following ways:

I believe in equal pay for equal jobs, but some jobs are made for a man to do. Women should not be like men.

Woman is woman. Women should have the right to work but they should leave the rough work for men.

Women want to be like men and to be treated like men, but they are definitely different from men.

The feminist theoretical perspective, on the other hand, holds that male/female differences, in the main, have been created socially and that relations of power have sustained these differences and made them *appear* to be inevitable in the interest of one group over those of the other. This assumption, which influences this work, leads to a different analysis than that offered by holders of the *natural differences* perspective. In the end, however, the conclusions drawn from either perspective are similar: gender clearly defines certain parameters of the life experience, and women, overall, have more difficult lives than men.

### *Palestinian Women Compare Their Lives to Those of Their Mothers*

When Palestinian women compare their lives with those of their mothers they feel that their own lives are significantly different from, and substantially better than, their mothers' lives.<sup>1</sup> The difference cited most frequently was their greater education. Indeed, the difference in many cases was quite dramatic: only a few years of formal education for the mothers, the majority of whom are illiterate, compared to at least a high-school education for the daughters. An increasing number of single immigrant Palestinian women under twenty-five in the United States have bachelors degrees and some have graduate degrees.

Palestinian women expressed the belief that their education allows

them to be more in touch with their children's lives than their mothers were able to be with theirs. When these women were growing up and attending school, their mothers could not help them with schoolwork; in contrast, this generation has the educational background to allow them to work with their children. The women in this study also said that they are treated with more respect by Palestinian men because they are educated, but this respect goes only so far. Palestinian men without a college education, and even some with one, prefer to marry women who did not attend college. One woman told me:

Some Palestinian men like educated women, but some of the guys say that they don't like educated women because they are too demanding and too much trouble.

Immigrant Palestinian women with a college education<sup>2</sup> feel it brings them many benefits. They say it allows them to have a different perspective on life than their mothers have. Even the way in which they make decisions is different:

I have a lot more schooling than my mother did and I look at my life differently. She makes her decisions based on what others will say about her. I make my decisions based on what I feel is right, within the cultural limits.

A college education also makes it possible for women to find jobs. This changes their role in the family to one of potential breadwinner. One woman said, "I can look at life in a different way. If I marry and we need money, I can help my husband by working." To understand why women with a college education are more likely to get jobs than those without, we must keep in mind the cultural norm that women should not perform manual labor or "men's work." College-educated women are able to find jobs that do not do so. Finally, a college education offers women a different view of their future:

My dream has been to get a good college degree. My mother's dream was to get a husband. All she thought about was that one day her sons would take care of her. I would never expect that from my sons. I feel I must learn to take care of myself. I would not want to put that burden on my sons.

The second most frequently mentioned difference between these women's lives and their mothers' lives is how they spend each day. These Palestinian women feel that, compared to their mothers, the way they



spend their time has improved. Married women say they spend more time with their husbands than their mothers did.

My father would go out and enjoy himself without my mother.

They never did anything together. Not so for me. We do many things together.

Part of this difference comes from changes in the way married couples are viewed by younger members of Palestinian society. The concept of a romantic relationship between a man and a woman is beginning to replace the utilitarian concept of the past. Social activities, always gender-segregated in the past, are no longer necessarily so. Another difference is that while most chain immigrants grew up in the United States with their fathers while their mothers remained in Palestine—with husbands and wives sometimes seeing each other only once a year—their married children share a home with their spouses. Another difference is created by the nature of life in the United States. For instance, a significant majority of Palestinian women in the United States are dependent upon their husbands for mobility and a social life. The only other way for them to have a social life is daytime visits with other women. Further, because of long work hours and the dispersion or absence of kin in their urban neighborhoods, men are more likely to come home after work than to visit male relatives, as they would have done in a Palestinian village or town.

Palestinian women also feel they spend less time on housework and perform less manual labor than their mothers did. These difference are due mainly to modern conveniences and the fact that these women, living in the United States, do not perform the labor of village women.

My mother never had a refrigerator or a stove. She woke up at five in the morning to clean, cook, milk the cows, and feed chickens. She made breakfast, and we went to school. All her life was only working. All their money went to feed and clothe children. I have machines to help me with laundry and cooking, whereas she did everything with her hands. Except for my children and cooking, I can finish all my housework in the afternoon, while my mother worked from the time she got up until she went to sleep. She baked bread; I buy ours. My mother had nine children; I have four.

Having fewer children than their mothers had was another commonly cited difference and improvement over their mothers lives, especially for

women under age thirty-five. The life histories of my study show that immigrant women between the age of eighteen and forty-two have an average of eight siblings, whereas the largest families in Chicago, which are among the new village immigrants, average only five children. The more educated the woman, the fewer children she is likely to have. College-educated Palestinian women in Chicago say they want no more than three children. This is true despite the part of the Palestinian ethos that, to keep Palestine alive, encourages women to have as many children as possible, to make up for lost martyrs (Palestinians who have died in war, from bombing raids, and under occupation). In the Middle East, this perspective on childbearing is adopted mainly by non-college-educated peasant women and also refugees. Palestinian women in the United States, including peasant women, say it is too expensive here to have more than five children.

Immigrant Palestinian women also said that their lives are, or will be, better than their mothers' lives because of the changes in the process leading to marriage. About half (seven) of the married women and all of the single women interviewed shared this view. Among those already married, the main difference in the marital process was that they were allowed to voice their opinions as to whether they thought they could live with the man asking for their hand in marriage before they became engaged to him.

Before, there was no question as to whether you could live with the man. It was expected that you could, and you would be whatever he wanted you to be. Now, at least, they ask us if we think we can live with the man and we have more right to say no.

A few women said they married men that they met and selected rather than men suggested by family members or outsiders. I found this to be the case only among women who finished college before marriage:

I met my husband at the university. Many times my family wanted me to marry their choice, one of my relatives. But I refused, and my brothers were understanding. [Respondent's father is deceased.] I was frank with my family. I told them I would not marry a man I didn't know. Even if he was from a rich and good family. I always expressed my opinion on this. I told them about my husband. I told them he was a good man

and I wanted to marry him. I reached a point where either I was going to marry him or stay unmarried [age twenty-nine]. They finally gave in, but they gave my husband many conditions. They made him write a marriage contract with many, many conditions, especially if he divorces me. [Do you think this path to marriage is unusual?] I don't know the statistics, but I think it is becoming more common.

Finally, some women say that their lives are better than their mothers' lives because they sacrifice less of themselves. This view was expressed by one-quarter of the immigrant women interviewed. While these women say their primary responsibility in life is to their husbands and children and that they will sacrifice their own needs for those of their family, the degree of their self-sacrifice will not be total, as it was for their mothers.

My mother was married at sixteen. She could not plan any of her life. She always did what my father wanted her to do. She did what was best for her family. I feel she never really lived her life and I feel bad about that. But, everyone around her was the same, so I know that she was not miserable, and she did not question these things. She was capable of being happy with it. In contrast, in my family, my needs also get taken into account.

For all these reasons: more education, less time spent on household chores, more time spent with husbands, and fewer children, Palestinian women in the United States feel that they are better off than their mothers and that the quality of life for Palestinian women has improved, were it not for the fact of the occupation and their statelessness. In this regard, both mothers and daughters have suffered from exile and family dispersion: mothers lose their daughters to exile; daughters lose their mothers' company and support, or both go into exile.

Among women who married by arrangement, women who were given some say about their marriage feel their marital lives are better because of it. Women who chose their husbands also feel this way. Single Palestinian women in the United States now expect to be given some latitude before accepting a marriage proposal. They will not accept the traditional arranged ways of their parents—they will not marry men whom they have not met and of whom they have not approved.

## *Palestinian Women Compare Their Lives to Those of Palestinian Men*

When the immigrant Palestinian women in this study compare their lives to those of Palestinian men, they said that although men work hard to support their families, men have too many privileges. The double standard in Palestinian society became evident to these women when, even as little girls, they had to serve and clean up after their brothers.

I had to do housework but the boys never did. The boys would throw their pajamas down and we had to pick them up.

That made it wrong. We did not mind helping our mother but the boys did nothing but make us work. I wanted to be a boy.

Palestinian women grew up monitored and disciplined while it seemed that the boys could do whatever they wanted.

From the time they are born, girls are looked at differently.

Boys act superior and they grow up that way. The girls should be shy and obedient. Palestinian girls are always told "you can't do this; you can't do that." Girls have to have a good reason to do anything, but the boys do what they want. Girls' mistakes are taken very seriously, and punishment is often severe. The culture is too strict on girls.

As adults, Palestinian women must continue to confront male privilege. One woman said, "The culture works so that men always have the advantage." This advantage means that men are given the benefit of the doubt when there are problems between a man and a woman. If a couple gets divorced, the woman is blamed. If they can't have children, the woman is the first to be held responsible. If there are disagreements, the woman is expected to change to satisfy the wishes of the man. Men have more power than women in the culture. The male privilege that most irritated the Palestinian women in this study is that Palestinian men have far more freedom than women have, especially in the United States. As one woman put it:

Wherever they go, Palestinian men have more freedom than women have. Here they are able to get away with even more. In the Middle East, men do not have this much freedom. I don't like it but there is nothing I can do about it.

The women interviewed expressed the belief that, compared to men, there are many rights that they must struggle for and that they are at a disadvantage. They feel that their mothers were not bothered by these inequalities because that was how their mothers were raised, that they didn't know any other way of life. But when the respondents were asked if they thought Arab women were oppressed, eighteen out of the twenty-two said no. They do feel that the culture is changing, bringing more equality between women and men, but that this change takes time. More importantly, these women feel the issue to be subjective. They say Arab women do not feel deprived or unhappy; they are living in accordance with the way they were raised, and most women don't expect more than they have.

Living in the United States affects responses to questions about the oppression of Arab women in two main ways. First, they said that the American media have exaggerated the level of oppression Arab women face, showing rooms full of scantily clad women serving men as if this was representative of Arab life. One woman said, "This is just propaganda to make us look like backward and ignorant people." Second, living in the United States gives them a close look at another culture and another way of life for women. American women are perceived as having more freedom than Arab women. This exposure to a different culture causes Palestinian women to reassess the good and bad points in their own culture. Yet, the result of observing the lives of American women does not seem to alter radically Palestinian women's beliefs in their Arab culture. They say that while they live in a system where there is gender inequality, American women live in a system that offers them little respect as human beings.

### *Palestinian Women Compare Their Lives to Those of American Women*

When the women interviewed in this study compare their lives to those of the American women they see around them, very few of them express a desire to change places with an American woman. They see American women are seen as having more social freedom than they themselves have, but, as one woman said, "the freedom has many dark sides." Palestinian women say that American women are respected less by men and the



society at large than are Palestinian women. For example, they find the way women are treated when they are elderly horrifying:

When an American woman gets old, no one cares about her. Her children leave her and don't care what happens to her. They don't visit their parents. They put them in places when they don't want to take care of them. We have a different way. Our mothers and fathers sacrifice for us when we are young, so, when they get old, we take care of them. We would never let our mothers be alone.

Palestinian women also expressed the belief that American women are not well-treated by their husbands. They say that while they know that not every American marriage is bad, the fact that American men are not criticized by the family or society for certain destructive behaviors suggests that women are placed in a very vulnerable position, far more vulnerable than that of Palestinian women. There are two aspects of American life perceived as negative by Palestinian women are: The fact that many American women are forced to work whether they want to or not.

Arabs have more respect for women. The Arab woman has a better life because the man works a lot harder for the woman. An Arab man would never force a woman to work. If she feels she wants to stay home and take care of the children and not worry about money, he would respect her for this.

And the marital insecurity of American women.

American women have more freedom, but I do not think they have a good life. Their husbands leave them and the children. They have girlfriends while they are married. The woman has to raise her family by herself. For Arab women, if the marriage is real bad they can go to their family for help. From what I see, American women have a hard life too.

The Palestinians in this study do not like the loose family structure seen in American society: children do not respect their parents; husbands and wives do not respect each other; there is no glue in the society, only freedom. They perceive that Americans are raised to be most concerned about themselves, while Palestinians are raised to care for one another. Palestinian woman comply with the rules of the cultural system in which they must live, whether they like all of them or not, because to defy them

means to lose the support structures the culture provides. Without this structure, they feel vulnerable and empty. Loss of family, for them, is the greatest loss.

Another concern expressed by these Palestinian women is their fear for their personal safety in the United States. They see this problem as another example of the dark side of too much freedom and the lack of respect people have for each other, in general, and for women, in particular. They think that women pay for their freedom by being potential victims:

I am not against the American people, but the customs here are not good. I think this country is like a zoo. Women get raped; fathers rape their daughters; men attack women on the street and steal from them. We do not live like this in the Middle East.

However, these Palestinian women expressed their appreciation of the fact that American women have more legal rights than Palestinian women, especially when it comes to divorce. They would like to see Palestinian women have these rights. But, overall, they would not trade their lot for that of the American woman. Although American women have more freedoms and rights than they do, these Palestinian women see the trade-off as the loss of respect, emotional support, and security provided by their traditional system. This price is seen as too high. Their conclusion is, in one woman's words, "Women everywhere have it harder than men."

The belief the women of this study expressed is that the levels of male privilege and regulation of female behavior that are part of their culture should be decreased, and they wage their struggle for these changes within the context of their families. Some are more successful than others. Women who work outside the home want their husbands to share more housework and child care; some are successful, and some are not. They want to be trusted rather than monitored, they feel they are capable of staying within the cultural limits and do not need to be controlled or watched. Yet, their symbol of a better life for women is not the life of the Western or American woman. On the contrary, they feel American women deserve some of the respect and support that Palestinian women have. "The best system," said one respondent, echoing the sentiments of her female compatriots, "is a combination of both. We should take the good things from each culture and get rid of the bad."

## ❧ *Changing the System: Raising Daughters and Sons Differently*

The women in this study hope to change the inequalities in the cultural system by raising their sons and daughters differently from the ways in which they were raised. However, they know that despite their wish to treat their children more equally, their sons will have advantages over their daughters if they raise them in the "Arab way," as all of them plan to do. These feelings are expressed as follows:

I will give my daughters more freedom and let them have some fun in their lives. My parents raised their sons and daughters differently, but I want to raise them the same. I will try to treat them the same, not treat the boys as though they are special. But I am more afraid with my daughters. It is dangerous here for girls; there is molesting and rape. I want to give [my daughter] what I could not have, but she will not be able to do everything she wants.

It does not appear, from talking to immigrant Palestinian women who are young mothers, that the gender double standard concerning dating is going to change with this generation of Palestinian-American children. The overwhelming majority of women in this study said that they will not allow their daughters to date. They will not encourage their sons to do so either, but say what has been repeated numerous times, "You can't tell boys what to do, they just take their freedom." Sexual virginity at marriage is considered essential for girls, and these women say that they expect their daughters to remain virgins until marriage. Interestingly, these same women feel that men should have sexual experience before marriage, but they should have it with non-Arab women. Palestinian women are convinced that a man with sexual experience is more gentle and loving with his wife in bed.

The women in my study said they would let their daughters have more choice in who they married than they themselves had because the potential universe of marital partners is greater in the United States. Most of the women I spoke with said they would encourage their sons to marry Muslims but would insist on it for their daughters. A few women not from the traditional village subsector of the community said they would allow

their daughters to marry non-Muslims, but under different conditions. Some said the man would have to convert to Islam. Others said that as long as the man was Palestinian, whether Christian or Moslem, they would approve the marriage; this latter from very politically active women. A very few said they would not use any force on their daughters if the daughter was determined to marry the man she loved. One woman said:

I will not let my daughter date, but if she insisted on marrying other than an Arab Muslim, I would let her. Force is wrong when it comes to marriage, and I will try to accept what my daughter chooses.

### *Palestinian Women Compare Their Lives to Those of Women Who Have Countries*

It is nearly impossible to speak to a Palestinian woman about her life and not hear first about the tragedy of being a Palestinian. They say they carry the burden of statelessness on their backs and do not forget it, no matter what good fortune they may find outside of Palestine. Palestinian statelessness is a political reality that sets the normative order for the community. It also has concrete emotional effects on the daily lives of Palestinians. While Palestinian women assess the quality of their lives as compared with their mothers, Palestinian men, and American women, their primary focus is on the effects of statelessness on their daily lives. Palestinian women subsume many of the problems they face living in the United States under the problem of statelessness.\*

The three main attributes of their experiences of statelessness are:

1. a nagging pain—resulting from endless tales of suffering, either within their own family, among their friends, or on the part of Palestinians in general;
2. a feeling of always being unsettled, that life in any one place is temporary; and
3. the loneliness resulting from the dispersion of family members.

This nagging pain is difficult to describe in any tangible way except that it serves as a constant reminder to Palestinians, wherever they are and whatever their situation, that they should not allow themselves to be too happy or too content. Of course, there is tangible suffering that causes this

pain. Every Palestinian has a story of family dispersion, land confiscation, torture, family members in prison, or harassments by military authorities. Beyond the personal, Palestinians, even those in the United States, say they suffer whenever bombs are dropped over the refugee camps in Lebanon, when massacres occur, and when youths are beaten by soldiers. The Palestinian pain is a communal pain and Palestinians feel that it is their national duty to bear it. In *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*, Edward Said says that it is not possible to speak with certainty about how every Palestinian feels: "Ours has been too various and scattered a fate for that sort of correspondence. (1986: 5). However, he affirms the importance of suffering to collective and individual Palestinian lives. Said says that despite the varied and scattered fates of Palestinians, "we do in fact form a community, if at heart a community built on suffering and exile."

The mainstream American media exacerbate this communal pain. In the land of information and democracy, the Palestinians of this study feel that their suffering is discounted and their history purposely ignored. They feel that their lives and deaths are portrayed as meaningless, and that they have been reduced to a stereotype: terrorist.

We have suffered a lot, but, when I look at the American television, I see that only Jews are people and capable of suffering. We are portrayed as madmen walking around with guns. When our people die, they don't show crying families at the funeral. Our lives mean nothing. Sometimes I feel like a knife is being turned in our bleeding wound.

The respondents described this persistent feeling of pain in various ways. For all of them, it throws a gray cover over their lives, no matter how good other aspects of their lives may be.

I am getting a good education here, but sometimes it feels to me like I am dying day after day. Nobody cares about us. Everyone seems to want us to disappear. I want to be with my people.

As they transmit the Palestinian language and customs to their children, these women also plan to pass on the Palestinian pain, not with the intention of being sadistic, but as part of their national duty. They have varying methods of transmitting the Palestinian experience to their American-raised children. One way is to keep their children from being too spoiled:



We don't allow ourselves to forget about what is going on back home. Even now I will not buy myself expensive clothes because I do not think it is right with what is going on there. I will not buy my baby toys either.

Another is to send their children to their homeland to witness life under occupation themselves:

Though my life is good, materially, here, I always feel the Palestinian problems. I dream to go back to my country someday. Until then, I will raise my children as Palestinians. I want them to know our problems, to feel our suffering. I want them to live there and suffer the way we did. Our suffering has made us very strong.

Knowing that suffering is an integral part of the Palestinian collective identity helps explain why Palestinian women tolerate some of the worst aspects of their lives in the United States. They do not view them as an outcome of gender inequalities in the culture. Rather, they see them as just another result of having to live in exile—another pain they must suffer as their fate as Palestinians. Consequently, women in the community who do see the problems Palestinian women face in the United States as gender issues and try to organize women on this basis do not receive the cooperation they might expect from other Palestinian women. Activists are further confronted with the charge that they are trying to de-Palestinianize Palestinian women, in contradiction to the national drive to keep the culture alive. Gender issues and political issues are ideologically entwined. This connection creates great obstacles when confronting gender issues.

The Palestinian pain is augmented, as expressed by these Palestinians living in exile, by a feeling of unsettledness and tentativeness. Wherever they live, Palestinians live in two worlds. One is the world of survival, which requires an orientation to the here and now. The other is the world of returning to Palestine, which results in an ambiguous orientation to almost any place of residence other than Palestine. In practice, responsibility for sustaining these two worlds is allocated by gender among Palestinians in the United States. The world of survival is the world that Palestinian men in the United States sustain, while Palestinian women sustain the world of return. The cultural division of labor is another indication of the level to which gender and politics are integrated.

Palestinians living in many parts of the world believe that they could be uprooted and sent wandering at any time, and this feeling directs much of their day-to-day action. Palestinians in the United States are less vulnerable to fears of being expelled since most eventually are able to obtain American residency and citizenship rights through relatives or marriage to an American. Nonetheless, some of the recent United States government plans to deport and incarcerate some Palestinians for their political views struck some fear in the community. This tentative attitude towards life in the United States is expressed as follows:

No matter how much freedom we get here or how much money we make, we really do not belong here.

This tentativeness is accompanied by political alienation, which Palestinians say results from United States government policy toward them.

We are law-abiding American citizens who pay taxes, but no one wants to hear our voices. The American government does not treat us as people; it is not fair or objective about our problems. Like everyone else, the American government just wants us to go away.

Given the primacy of these sentiments on what it means to be a Palestinian and on life in exile, Palestinian women say that it is not possible to feel that they have a good life. The collective Palestinian view on exile transforms gender issues into national political issues, unresolvable among those in exile until nationhood is resolved. Gender issues in the homeland, however, can be confronted because there the culture is alive and real. It is, therefore, changeable.

Although these sentiments of exile are not unique to women, we have seen that the practical results of the statelessness of the Palestinians has created special burdens for Palestinian women in the United States. The dispersion of Palestinians that has resulted from statelessness and military occupation has physically, though not emotionally, broken up Palestinian families into pieces scattered about the globe. Family is extremely important in the Palestinian culture, but for women it is also the mainstay of their daily lives. It is their primary source of support and many times their sole devotion. Absence of family engenders a feeling of loneliness. As noted, Palestinian women have fewer alternatives than men for making a bad situation better. If they feel lonely they cannot readily jump into the

car and go to a coffee shop; if they are single, they are not free to date Americans to dispel the loneliness. The end result is that even if given all the elements of what might objectively be considered a good life—health, a kind and healthy husband, nice children, a home, a solid financial base, and a meaningful daily life—Palestinian women, nonetheless, feel dissatisfied.

## *Conclusion*

The Palestinian women in this study report that their historical experience as Palestinians, and all that this entails, is the single largest detriment to the quality of their lives. Allowing for this feeling, they find that their lives have changed significantly from those of their mothers, mostly in a positive direction. They see that Palestinian men work hard and have many responsibilities, but they also have too many privileges. These women feel that American women are better off than Palestinian women in some ways, and worse off in other ways. Except for the fact that American women have a country, they would not want, for the most part, to trade their lives for those of American women. Finally, these Palestinian women believe that the fact of female hardship is universal. Were it not for their statelessness, their aggregate lives as women are no better or worse than other women's lives.

The women of this study seek changes in the traditional Palestinian cultural system, which gives them fewer rights than men. However, they are not prepared to completely abandon this system, for it provides them with community, support, security, and the promise of increasing power, status, and individual autonomy as they grow older. These advantages stand in contrast to their perceptions of American women's experiences, however limited these perceptions are by their membership in an insular ethnic community. These women found, however, that life in exile provides them with few of the traditional rewards for conformity with Palestinian values. This explains their view of their unsatisfactory situation in the United States as primarily a political problem rather than one of gender inequality, solvable only upon return to an intact Palestinian society free of foreign occupation.

## ❧ References

- Abadan-Unat, Nermin. 1977. "Implications of Migration on Emancipation and Pseudo-emancipation of Turkish Women." *International Migration Review* 6: 31-57.
- Abu-Lughod, Ibrahim, ed. 1971. *The Transformation of Palestine*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Janet. 1985, "The Continuing Expulsions From Palestine." In *Palestine: Continuing Dispossession*, ed. Glen Perry. Belmont, Mass.: Arab American University Graduates Press.
- . 1986. "The Demographic War for Palestine." *The Link*. New York: Americans for Middle East Understanding.
- Aruri, Naseer, ed. 1983. *Occupation: Israel over Palestine*. Belmont, Mass.: Arab American University Graduates.
- Alund, A. 1978. "The Immigrant Women: Emancipation via Consumption." *Ekot Fran Gardagen*. University of Umea, Sweden: Department of Sociology Research Report.
- Barnard, Jessie. 1981. *The Female World*. New York: The Free Press.
- Bonacich, Edna. 1973. "A Theory of Middleman Minorities." *American Sociological Review* 38, (October): 583-594.
- Brouwer, L. and M. Preister. 1983. "Living in Between: Turkish Women in Their Homeland and in the Netherlands." In *One Way Ticket: Migration and Female Labour*, ed. Annie Philzacklea. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Granqvist, Hilma. 1935. *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, vol. 2. Helsingfors: Societa Scientarium Fennica. *International Migration Review*. 1984. Women In Migration (special issue) 48, no. 4.
- Park, Robert. 1928. "Human Migration and the Marginal Man." *American Journal of Sociology* 33: 881-893.
- Philzacklea, Annie, ed. 1983. *One Way Ticket: Migration and Female Labor*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Rosaldo, Michelle and Louis Lamphere. 1974. *Woman, Culture, and Society*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- Said, Edward. 1986. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Pantheon.
- Seller, Maxine Schwartz, ed. 1981. *Immigrant Women*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.