It ought to be possible for historians to "make visible the assignment of subject positions," not in the sense of capturing the reality of objects seen, but of trying to understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive process by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced, and which processes themselves are unremarked and indeed achieve their effect because they are unnoticed.

Joan Wallach Scott, "Evidence of Experience"

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Preface

The way we tell the stories of our past has life and death consequences. Both peoples in Israel and Palestine have interpreted their histories in (at least) two antagonistic ways that obliterate the truth of the other. The stories become sources of and justifications for war. This book goes against the grain of a century of historical writing about Jews and Arabs in Palestine and Israel. It grows out of scholarship of the past decade or so by and about Israelis and Palestinians that demythologizes national histories and breaks down the dichotomy between two opposing tellings. Yet most of the scholars who attempt these exposés do not challenge the male-centeredness of the stories. While the history contained in this book acknowledges the legitimacy and interdependency of both peoples' political identities, it honors the importance of women in formulating them.

There are very few books that attempt to address the histories of both Arab and Jewish women in the region. There are still fewer that seek to understand the roles that these women played in the formative years of their national movements. This book traces some of the ways that issues of women and gender contributed to the creation of new political identities for Jews and Arabs of Palestine before the creation of the state of Israel. It seeks to unmask the hidden discourse of gender in international conflict. Historian Joan Scott observed that "those absent from official accounts partook nonetheless in the making of history; those who are silent speak eloquently about the meanings of power and the uses of political authority."[1] This study helps put to rest the illusion that political history and international conflict are gender neutral. During one hundred years of conflict over the one land, Palestinian Arabs' and Israeli Jews' ideas about male and female roles played a central yet often invisible part in shaping nationalism and fueling conflict.

Telling the history of Jews' and Arabs' struggle for existence and independence in one land is a difficult task. For each people viewed the other and served the other as a primary obstacle to achieving dignity and security in their land. Part of the historian's task is to explore painful realities about the past to make possible a newly imagined future. A study of women and politics enables us to deconstruct exclusive notions of national "self" and "other" and expose unacknowledged battles for survival by subgroups obscured within a nationalist rubric. For identity, whether sexual or political, is to a large extent a social construct even as it claims hearts, minds, and lives.

Women, real and imagined, were central to the notions of who each people wished to be and wished not to be, of how they envisioned their enemies and allies. Women were entangled in discussions of male traits lauded by nationalists, in relationships between people and land, in clashes between self-appointed modernizers and so-called guardians of tradition, and in perceptions of difference and power between the peoples of Palestine. Women were present in Zionist conceptions of Arab Palestinians, in images of the Jewish pioneer, in Arab defense of honor and land, in Arab rage at Jewish colonists, in dismissal and demonization of the "other."

Scholars still lament that "explorations of the gendering of the national imagination have been conspicuously paltry."[2] Yet there is a growing understanding of the ways in which women influenced and were influenced by political struggles. Although this study explores the unique situation of Arab and Jewish women in a particular place and time, it nevertheless underscores the commonality of women's struggles everywhere.

One does not have to haunt distant archives to discover how central women were to the two conflicting narratives of nationalism in Palestine. This work asks new questions of old published sources written by men and women, read by men and women who took part in formulating new national identities before and during the British Mandate years, from around the 1860s through the 1940s. In *Palestinians,* Kimmerling and Migdal describe these published works as "furnishing the shared aesthetic and intellectual material for a concrete expression of the new Palestinism—a cultural glue helping to keep the society together. The principal medium was the printing press, producing textbooks, fiction,

history, political tracts, translations, and . . . poetry."[3] It is the very accessibility of these materials that underscores the way power operated to obscure the obvious role women and gender played in these narratives.

Thirty years ago, I began to wrestle with issues of women and gender in Palestinian and Jewish history. In the 1970s, I lived in Jerusalem for six years. During that time I helped organize some of the early feminist (1971–72) and Arab-Jewish (1975–80) grassroots movements. I witnessed how Israeli women labored under a myth of liberation that actually veiled limits on their lives then invisible in Israeli society. I saw that the so-called powerlessness of Arab women, a notion that I had imbibed from Western media and early second-wave feminism, obscured different kinds of power I had never encountered among women. The Palestinian and Israeli men and women that I met during my early years there helped to formulate my questions here.

I learned that no matter how angered I was by injustices incurred by Israel's creation or its contradictions as a democratic and Jewish state, that it and its peoples' survival were a victory. I learned that no matter how angered I was by tragedies wrought by Palestinian violence or their rejection of Israel, Palestinians' dignity and independence were paramount.

The apparent impossibility of celebrating both peoples' nationalist achievements set me on a course of investigation. Inspiration gained from those six years of work and friendship with Israeli and Palestinian women and men eventually propelled me to return to the university for formal study of Middle East history. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly, I found that the polarization and tensions so characteristic of the conflict permeated academia. Yet by then I was determined to reject the dismissal or vilification of one people's national aspirations to legitimize or romanticize the other.

When gender emerged as a mode of analysis in the late 1980s, I began research for a dissertation that forms the basis of this book. In this work, "gender" is a vehicle for exposing contradictions within each people's historical narratives and for underscoring the legitimacy of each people's desire for political empowerment. Since the 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles for a negotiated settlement, this position has become

less subversive and more imperative as setbacks to peace return us to an outmoded and tragically untenable future.

The book explores issues of women and gender from the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth centuries. It contends that the two national movements in Palestine turned women and gender into linchpins of conflict and possibilities of interconnection. These processes do not end in 1948 but evolve within new political contexts created with the state of Israel and the Palestinian exile. The consequences for gender and politics in Israel and Palestine after 1948 are beyond the scope of this book and indeed enjoy significantly more scholarly attention than the pre-1948 period.

I have divided the study into four parts. Part I provides a context for the work both in terms of scholarship and history. Chapter 1 introduces objectives, sources, methodological approaches, and problems of an exploration of "(en)gendering nations," of two peoples claiming one land. Chapter 2 of this first part peruses the scholarship that grounds this study and shows how it is unique. Chapters 3 and 4 construct a narrative history of the conflict from the nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries highlighting the evolution of two new national identities.

Part II contains three chapters that probe the ways nationalists imagined their communities through particular gender tropes. It examines representations of manhood and masculinity (chapter 5), the feminization of the land as the central symbol of both national movements (chapter 6), and nationalist fantasies about "their" women (chapter 7).

Part III investigates how women and gender operated in the construction of hierarchies of difference and power between the two peoples. At the intersection of nationalism and modernization, treatment of women became a gauge of progress and civilization (chapter 8). Debates about the importance and content of girls' education nuanced discourse on national progress (chapter 9). Narratives in film, plays, and literature turned women and issues of gender into validation of the national "self" and invalidation of the enemy "other." Each group formed attitudes towards the other in part through judgments about the others' women and by characterizing the enemy with gendered metaphors (chapter 10).

Part IV returns to a historical chronology of conflict, this time with focus on the actions, writings, desires, and protests of the women for whom nationalism opened unprecedented opportunities (chapter 11). So

the chronological context of historical narrative (chapters 3, 4, and 11) brackets the six chapters of discourse analysis (chapters 5 through 10). Chapter 12, the final chapter, probes Jewish and Arab women's interactions with each other that transgressed conventional boundaries between the two peoples. It examines how women contested standard narratives of conflict and created alternative modes of understanding and action.

Issues of women and gender were an intricate part of creating, defining, and perpetuating conflict in Palestine. This is true for all national movements. What was unique to Arab and Jewish nationalisms was that each side constructed its identities in part on the belief that the other's movement was so utterly different and irreconcilable from its own. Yet a deconstruction of sexual and political identities also reveals hidden possibilities of interconnectedness.

I want to thank the *Arab Studies Journal* for granting me permission to use material from my article on "*Shahada* and *Haganah*." I also thank I. B. Tauris for allowing me to use material previously published in a chapter of *Gendering the Middle East* and the volume's editor, Deniz Kandiyoti, for encouraging me to summarize my research in her cutting-edge collection. Chapter 9 was originally presented as a paper at the World Union of Jewish Studies Conference in Jerusalem in 1997.

Zachary Lockman guided this project in the initial research phase for a dissertation as my advisor at Harvard. Susan Miller, then associate director of the Center for Middle East Studies at Harvard, labored over the details and theoretical implications with intelligent precision. Judith Tucker read the manuscript in its entirety as a dissertation and contributed sage insight. Most recently, Roger Owen found time while director of the Center for Middle East Studies at Harvard to read this work and pose tough questions that helped to morph it from dissertation to book.

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