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**Review of Women's Studies Volumes 1 (2003), 2 (2004), 3 (2005)**, Edited by Penny Johnson (English) and Jamil Hilal (Arabic). Published by the Institute of Women's Studies, Birzeit University.

**REVIEWED BY ROSEMARY SAYIGH**

The *Review of Women's Studies* is remarkable on several counts: the level of interest of its contents; its thrust towards linking gender studies to the building of a democratic Arab society; and not least the conditions of its production under Israeli siege and closure. The year of its launching, 2002, saw the Israeli re-occupation of the whole West Bank, manifested in a situation of violence, closure, and curfew that affected every aspect of daily life. As the Introduction to the first volume notes, this was a period when Birzeit students and faculty faced a daily struggle to reach the university. That the Birzeit Institute of Women's Studies (IWS) carried on and even expanded its teaching, research and publication program under such conditions is a sign of the dynamic that links work on gender to Palestinian resistance.

From its establishment in 1994, the Birzeit Institute of Women's Studies has been active in the field of publishing in English and Arabic, notably the 'Gender and Society' working papers, and the 'Palestinian Women: A Status Report' series. In 1998, it launched its MA teaching program in Gender, Law and Development. Around this program a cadre of faculty and graduate student

researchers has been formed that has engaged in large collective surveys as well as individual research projects. This research has laid an infrastructure of collective survey work for the *Review* to draw on, for example a survey of 2,254 households in nineteen communities in the West Bank and Gaza (1999); a survey of 401 households affected by Israeli attack in 2002; and an in-depth study of the effects of the occupation on three Ramallah neighborhoods (begun in 2004). Senior students from the MA program have taken part in these projects.

Articles by senior Institute faculty and associates form the core of the *Review*, often chapters written for books published outside the region, or excerpted from theses. Papers by beginner scholars add to the *Review's* exceptionality as both showcase and stimulus for new research in gender. Each issue carries independent English and Arabic sections. Explanatory introductions, neat layout and almost total freedom from linguistic or typographical errors make the *Review* a pleasure to read.

Law and legal reform figure prominently. Rema Hammami's "Attitudes Towards Legal Reform of Personal Status Law in Palestine" (volume 1) is based on an attitudinal survey designed by the Institute in March 2000. Shuaa Marrar gives a grassroots perspective in her "Views from the Ground: Experiences and Perceptions of Women's Rights and Activism in the Lives of Rural and Refugee Women" (volume 2). A paper by Fadwa Labidi examines *fatwas* regarding early marriage issued by the Palestinian Al-Fatwa Supreme Council (volume 2). Nahda Shehadeh's study of *nafaqa* claims in courts in Gaza points to the way ordinary women may bring about change in legal interpretation (volume 2). The paper on 'crimes of honour' by Lynn Welchman and Sara Hossein (volume 3) is excerpted from a research and action project around the globe, and emphasizes the use of the phrase 'crimes of honour' in stereotyping Islamic societies. These papers illuminate the interaction between an emergent legal framework and popular male and female attitudes to women's rights, in an Arab society under occupation.

The occupation/resistance dynamic is present throughout these first three issues of the *Review* as a frame through which gender is examined. The clearest statement is given by Penny Johnson and Eileen Kuttub in "Where have All the Women (and Men) Gone?" (volume 1), a paper that points to the inequalities implicit in the Oslo Accords and a cascade of social effects: a militarization of younger men; a 'crisis of paternity' for older ones through unemployment; stress in gender roles and 'hardening of gender asymmetries'. Whereas the first Intifada brought women into the streets, the second has intensified their domestic roles, making these harder and more agonizing. Yet activist women contribute in numerous ways, through vigils and demonstrations, and in forums that keep alive the debate on the relationship between nationalism and feminism.

Islah Jad's "The NGOization of the Arab Women's Movements" (volume 2) takes up an important issue as relevant to Lebanon and other Arab countries as to Palestine. The rapid growth of NGOs in the Arab world is part of a global phenomenon, closely linked to the priorities of Northern donors. Jad suggests that local NGOs are not necessarily contributing to social justice or the building of civil society, and that when women activists move into NGO work they are likely to become disconnected from the grass-roots.

Palestinian households and families caught under Israeli occupation and involved in resistance to it is another major focus of IWS research, since this dynamic is bound to affect gender relations, whether through impoverishment, human loss, men's imprisonment, women's greater work load, or reactions around gender. Lisa Taraki's "Palestine Through the Lens of the Family" (volume 2) is the introduction to a newly published book, which emanates from the 1999 household survey mentioned earlier, and reflects the critical stance of the IWS towards common ideas such as that of the Palestinian family's unlimited capacity to absorb shocks. Lamis Abu Nahleh's "The Rise and Fall of a Patriarch" (volume 3), excerpted from her chapter in the same book, is a rare longitudinal study that looks at the same family over two generations, with particular focus on the power

of the household heads, and rebellion and status-change of the women of the family. Another contribution by Abu Nahleh comes out of the 1999 household survey and explores its findings in relation to parental attitudes towards the employment of daughters and daughters-in-law (volume 1). A suggestive finding here is the greater conservatism of urban compared to rural parents. Based in the three communities study of 2004, Penny Johnson looks closely at Am'ari camp, noting an increasing tendency towards class stratification in spite of greater poverty and insecurity compared with 'normal' neighbourhoods. Edouard Conte's "The Other Wall" (volume 3) shows how Palestinian families are affected by new Israeli laws forbidding marriage across the Green Line. Though gender history is not a component of the Institute's program, two of the *Review's* articles break this ground. Rema Hammami's "Gender, Nakbe and Nation: Palestinian Women's Presence and Absence in the Narration of 1948 Memories" (volume 2) analyzes the almost total absence of women's voices from media commemorations of the Nakba in 1998. While based on recent texts, Hammami carries her analysis back to the exclusion of women in the Birzeit's 'Destroyed Village' series, and to the period of Resistance group mobilization in Lebanon during the 1970s, when the Resistance raised peasant men to a symbol of resistance while failing to record their voices. Hammami links this muting of women and peasant men to their similarly iconic meanings in nationalist representation. Islah Jad's "Re-Reading the Mandate: Palestinian Women and the Double Jeopardy of Colonialism" is taken from her masterly history of the Palestinian women's movement that sets it in each successive historical context up to the second Intifada. Jad points to the importance of the Mandate in crystallizing a class structure that continues to affect women and their mobilization.

The Documents section carried in each issue of the *Review* closely reflects the Occupation, and the Institute's involvement in researching its impact on Palestinian communities and women. Rita Giacaman and Penny Johnson's report on "Who Lives in Jenin Camp?" (volume 1) was written during Israel's attack in the spring of 2002, when Jenin was under siege and Ramallah under curfew. Produced under the same conditions, Eileen Kuttab and Riham Barghouthi's report on "The Impact of Armed Conflict on Palestinian Women" (volume 1) is based on a new survey of wives and mothers in 401 households affected by Israeli violence. The Institute contributed a gender section to the national report carried by the Palestinian delegation to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo (1994), published in volume 2 of the *Review*. Volume 3 carries a report on "Meeting the Housing Needs of Palestinian Women and Men: Conclusions and Recommendations" by Eileen Kuttab, Randa Nassar, and Lina Mi'ari, based in an attitudinal survey of women's and men's attitudes towards property rights. Publication of a forum on the Palestinian draft constitution ("*Arba'a mudakhalat hawl muswadat al-dustour*") (volume 1) is further evidence of the Institute's involvement with nation-building, gender and democracy.

For all its disastrous political consequences, the Oslo Accords let loose a wave of creativity inside the occupied Palestinian territories which went beyond state-building. A set of lively institutions – educational, legal, health, statistical, cultural, research – arose in the same historical context of hope of liberation and independence. Anyone visiting the West Bank and Gaza cannot but be amazed by this charge of productivity in the face of Israeli repression. The *Review* (and the Institute of Women's Studies behind it) is a part of this wave of national and cultural resistance. As the editors remark in their Introduction to the first issue, "The struggle to teach and conduct research is part of the determination of Palestinian society to survive, develop and live and work as ordinary human beings, even when under siege."

For more information: <http://www.birzeit.edu/centers/wso.html> or <http://home/birzeit.edu.wsi>

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