

Land Before Honour: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories(*) by Kitty Warnock⁽¹⁾

HONOUR

In Palestinian peasant society, there were components of honour that the Homeric Greeks would have recognized - courage, generosity, magnanimity. Honour is also related to land and qualities associated with land, stability and long history, plentiful sons and good husbandry. "Ma illu ard, fish 'indu 'ard - He who has no land, has no honour. Honour was not a measure of individual moral qualities; it pertained to families, not individuals and was a relationship between a family and the community. . . .

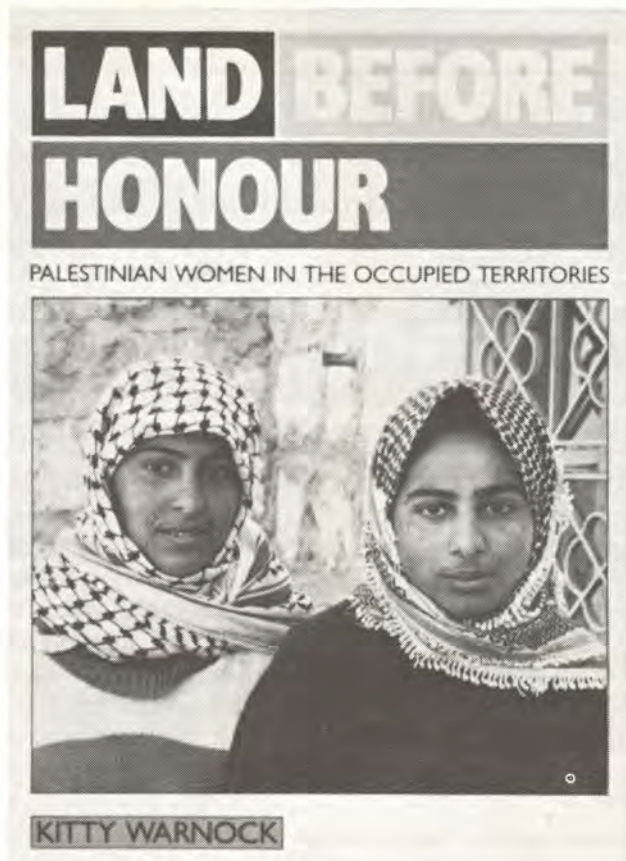
One function of the ideology of honour was to support the internal structure of the family; to be precise; to idealize men's control over women. Its most keenly felt daily requirement was that the male members of a family should protect the female from all dangers, but particularly from sexual impurity. The supremacy of this demand over other aspects of honour was demonstrated in 1948, when many of the Palestinian who fled their homes did so primarily out of fear that their women would be raped by Zionist soldiers.

The Achilles' heel of national resistance was subsequently acknowledged and condemned in a reversal of the old saying : "Al-Ard qabil al-'Ard - Land before Honour".2)

Kitty Warnock's *Land Before Honour*, is a result of four and a half years of living and working in the Palestinian West Bank. It is not politicized. It is based on simple observation, she notes. Her interest rose from the striking contrast

between the lives of many Palestinian mothers and their daughters; women with no formal education, bound by family, and daughters who study abroad achieve higher education in leading institutions.

Based on interviews with women of all ages and social backgrounds she examined key areas such as history, social change, freedom,



education, agricultural work, industrial work, politics and national struggle, women's organizations and the impact of the Intifada. She reveals the different ways in which women see themselves, their experiences and their place in the Palestine of the future.

For instance, she explains how Palestine was predominantly a peasant agricultural society sharing many characteristics with other peasant cultures whereby the mechanism for controlling wealth was the patrilineal family. In the interviews she noticed that "Older Palestinians appreciated labor saving devices which have made life easier for their daughters, but at the same time expressed a pride in their own competence, capacity for hard work and skills in the crafts now no longer used. In the occupied territories, these feelings have inevitably been overlaid by the sense that the land which made life possible

is slipping away and has often ceased to play a central economic role in people's lives, although it remains as a potent emotional and political symbols.⁽³⁾

The changes that have occurred in the lives of Palestinian women were compounded by the many events, developments and controversies around them. The women she interviewed, women of all ages, were in a process of examining their lives. They were collectively and individually searching for their identities. She explains and analyses how they have responded to the opportunities and the setbacks of the changes and turmoil that surrounds them, in ways that are active and complex.

Land before honour as a title implies the conflict between traditional codes of sexual purity, submission and

obedience of women, traditional methods of subsistence like agriculture, and the violent and turbulent struggle for independence and a national identity. In both cases the women must uphold the honour of the family and bear the struggle for a national identity •

R.A.H.

(*) Kitty Warnock, *Land Before Honour: Women in the Occupied Territories*. New York: Monthly Review Press. 1990. ISBN 0-85345-810-3.

(1) Kitty Warnock spent four years at the Palestinian University of Birzeit in the occupied West Bank, teaching the history of ideas and political theory. She now works as a development consultant in the Middle East and Africa.

(2) Warnock, *Ibid.* pg. 22

(3) Sarah Graham-Brown, "New Writing on women, Politics and Social Change", *Middle East Report*. November/December 1991, No. 173 Vol.21, No.6. pg.32.

LIBRAIRIE DU LIBAN

Over the past years we have built up an enviable reputation throughout the Arab World for the quality of our reference and general books. Here we are delighted to present three major series of books on English literature, designed to meet the particular needs of both student and the scholar.

York Classics

Is a series of attractively presented editions of famous works of English literature. Each title contains a useful introduction, the complete original text, detailed notes, and a glossary designed specifically to help the Arabic-speaking readers.

York Notes

Is the most comprehensive and successful series of English literature study guides available. Covering major works from medieval to modern English literature, as well as a number of works from world literature, each title offers the student a high standard of literary criticism, stimulating ideas and thought-provoking questions.

York Handbooks

Form a companion series to York Notes, and are designed to meet the wider needs of students of English language and literature. Titles in the series range from studies of linguistics and English grammar to surveys of major writers and periods of English literature.