

Swarthmore College

## Works

---

Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Works

Sociology & Anthropology

---

Winter 2003

## Family Planning In Galilee

Farha Ghannam

*Swarthmore College*, fghanna1@swarthmore.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-soc-anth>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Farha Ghannam. (2003). "Family Planning In Galilee". *Journal Of Palestine Studies*. Volume 32, Issue 2. 105-106. DOI: 10.1525/jps.2003.32.2.103  
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/fac-soc-anth/40>

An [accessible version](#) of this publication has been made available courtesy of Swarthmore College Libraries. For further accessibility assistance, please contact [openaccess@swarthmore.edu](mailto:openaccess@swarthmore.edu) with the title or URL of any relevant works.

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociology & Anthropology Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact [myworks@swarthmore.edu](mailto:myworks@swarthmore.edu).

various means—confiscation, lease, and purchase—only made matters worse.

By taking into account these changes, Dumper concludes that the long years of Israel's occupation, with all the changes that such control brought about, have made the return to the status quo that existed before 1967 difficult. At the same time, he argues that Israel's plans for unifying and Judaizing the city largely have been a failure. The Muslim community in the city shows signs of revival and self-assertion and the Church leadership has become more assertive about its disaffection with the Israeli vision for Jerusalem.

On the issue of the Old City and the peace process, Dumper offers insights into a complex situation that to some degree can explain the failure of the Camp David negotiations of 2000. By subjecting the issue of holy places to legal scrutiny, the author explains how the various laws that are in existence have managed, on one hand, to maintain the status quo in the city and, on the other hand, to change it beyond recognition. Of particular concern are the Israeli laws that annexed East Jerusalem to Israel and dissolved its independent administrative status, particularly the Israeli Law of Administrative Ordinance. Not only do these laws conflict with the many other pre-existing regulations regarding the status of the city (such as the Ottoman Status Quo of 1856 and Article 14 of the Mandate Charter of 1922), but they also violate commitments made to the Palestinians during the peace process. Further, Israeli laws that made it possible for settlers to move into the Old City on many occasions have been responsible for redefining and sometimes fueling the conflict over the city.

This is an unusual book in its theme and scope, but not unfamiliar. It is about sacred imagination, how it is legislated and negotiated and for what it stands, as well as about part of the political negotiations in the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Dumper has managed to write a comprehensive and coherent narrative that combines themes usually addressed separately. This well-documented historical and political study is a must read for students of Jerusalem's history and for scholars and politicians on all sides.

## **FAMILY PLANNING IN GALILEE**

**Birthing the Nation: Strategies of Palestinian Women in Israel**, by Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh, with a foreword by Hanan

Ashrawi. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. California Series in Public Anthropology. xvii + 256 pages. Bibliography to p. 275. Index to p. 283. \$24.95 paper.

### ***Reviewed by Farha Ghannam***

In this beautifully written ethnography, Rhoda Kanaaneh provides an insightful analysis of the politics of reproduction in the Galilee. Based mainly on fieldwork in her hometown, the author provides fascinating discussions of babies, boundaries, bodies, contraception, gender, and politics. Drawing on strong connections—family, relatives, neighbors, teachers, and friends—she provides us with an intimate view of how men and women view and negotiate their preferences for the ideal family size, happy childhood, safe and controlled sex, and beautiful bodies.

Reproductive discourses and practices, Kanaaneh argues, are shaped by “state policy, economic development, medicalization, and local dynamics” (p. 165). She starts her book by addressing the relationship between reproduction, politics, and nationalism. We read about the anxieties of Israeli politicians (from David Ben-Gurion to Yitzhak Rabin) over the national and religious identity of Israel. Since Israel's founding, the desire to keep it a Jewish state has led to such policies as budget allocations, health insurance, and medical services that attempt to encourage Jewish Israelis to reproduce while discouraging Palestinian Israelis from having children. To counter these policies and their general economic and political marginalization, many Palestinians view having babies as part of their national duty and resistance to Israeli hegemony. In this context, reproduction becomes a political project that is linked closely to gender and nationalism.

However, Israeli family planning, which emphasizes small family size, increasingly is appealing to Palestinians, who have a strong desire for modernity and a middle-class lifestyle. Thus, while many Palestinians in the Galilee “resist Israeli domination,” they “also express awe for Israel's technological superiority” (p. 81). Family planning here becomes part of a large project of “modernization,” and reproduction becomes closely linked to modern ideals and dreams. “Reproductive

---

**Farha Ghannam** is assistant professor of anthropology at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, and author of *Remaking the Modern: Space, Relocation, and the Politics of Identity in a Global Cairo* (University of California Press, 2002).

measures" (p. 105) are used more and more as key markers in classifying various social groups and showing their location in the social hierarchy. The opposition between the small family (positive and controlled reproduction) and the large family (negative and uncontrolled reproduction) is projected onto other oppositions, such as modern/primitive, Christian/Muslim, urban/rural, and foreign/local.

At the same time, having fewer children is shaped by consumerism. Many informants believed that they should secure all the consumer goods and products that their children desire. Several mothers and fathers see the ability to provide for one's children as central to good parenting, happy childhood, and healthy family life. In addition, the increasing medicalization of reproduction plays a central role in the Galilee. Medical assistance not only is allowing people to control reproduction (through contraception), have babies (reproductive technologies), and acquire the ideal body (through plastic surgery), but also it is allowing them to draw on science and medicalization to help in gender selection and securing a male heir.

Despite its many virtues, the book could have benefited from further discussions of some key issues. For example, the absence of an explicit discussion of class is noticeable in this book, especially in chapter 3. Distinctions based on education, clan, religion, and urban/rural differences imply a class dimension that the author has not analyzed. Furthermore, there are two important concepts that remain rather underconceptualized in this study. The first is modernization, which the author often equates with modernity, "development theory," and Westernization (see, for example, pp. 22 and 78). How are these concepts linked and different? And how is modernization related to globalization, another notion the author uses? The second concept is resistance, which, the author repeatedly argues, "mimics power" (p. 18). Yet, this assertion is not developed conceptually in the book. While it is clear that most of Kanaaneh's informants internalize modern discourses on reproduction and bodily forms, it is less clear how they contest and "resist" them. When does an act or a discourse become resistance? When does a discourse become a counterdiscourse (see, for example, pp. 135 and 152)? These issues are not sufficiently addressed in the book, and resistance seems to be everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

Still, this book is an engaging ethnography and a valuable addition to Middle Eastern anthropology in general and Palestinian studies in particular. I highly recommend it for students and scholars of gender, medical anthropology, and Middle Eastern studies.

## A LIFE EXAMINED

**Strangers in the House: Coming of Age in Occupied Palestine**, by Raja Shehadeh. South Royalton, VT: Steerforth Press. xv + 238 pages. \$25.00 cloth.

### *Reviewed by Carol Bardenstein*

Rarely does one encounter a memoir that so artfully, richly, and poignantly balances the tensions between telling an individual and a collective story as Raja Shehadeh does in his riveting memoir. A master of understatement, a gifted raconteur of anecdotes that are parable-like in their compactness, richness, and in being eminently re-tellable, and as subtle and introspective a narrator and observer of himself and all in his midst as one could possibly hope for, Shehadeh offers a moving and nuanced account of the arduous path of his sense of coming into personhood, of the complex relationship with his father, of people and social relations within his upper-middle-class milieu, and of living a life examined under the conditions of dispossession and occupation in the West Bank. Incredibly enough, he manages to impart much in all of these areas without emphasizing or developing one at the expense of another.

Even for those who have read widely about Palestine, the conditions of occupation, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the intersection of the lives of individuals with all of these, *Strangers in the House* offers a refreshing and invaluable contribution. While Shehadeh certainly is presenting an account of the collective experience of Palestinians, it is clear from the outset that he has no interest in delivering a "generic" or predictable composite portrayal for readers seeking affirmation of what they expect to read about the life of a Palestinian under Israeli occupation. At every turn, his narrative is enriched, textured and layered with idiosyncrasy, at times with humor in the written equivalent of a deadpan delivery and always with an irrepressible impulse and dedication to appre-

---

**Carol Bardenstein** teaches in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.