



ELISE YOUNG

NEW BOOK

Gender and Nation Building in the Middle East: The Political Economy of Health from Mandate Palestine to Refugee Camps in Jordan Forthcoming, Taurus Press, April, 2011

This book is a feminist historiographical analysis of politics of state building in Palestine and in Jordan. The approach brings together feminist epistemology and Middle East history and is based on examination of archival primary source documents and in-depth oral histories with Palestinian women who are refugees (of 1948 and 1967 wars) living in Jabal al-Hussein and Ba'qa Refugee Camps in Amman, Jordan.

The central question asked as a way of entering the history concerns changing definitions of health and health care systems. In Palestine, in the twentieth century, changes in definitions of health and health systems bring into the foreground gender, race, and class struggles as they define modern nation state building. In Chapter Two, for example, I analyze British and American use of 'modern' science and medicine to further economic and political goals. I analyze the interconnected race and gender constructs of nature and their ecological ramifications, utilizing archival materials documenting malaria control programs. These programs continued to be highlighted in Department of Health Reports from Palestine and Transjordan for the next several decades. Chapter Three goes on to analyze ramifications of British Administrative policies in regard to health, for Palestinian women.

The majority of the women interviewed are *daya*, or midwife/healers. Thus the book is also a history of British Administrative policies (Mandate Period) in regard to women and reproduction, and subsequent women and health policies instituted by UNRWA in regard to women and reproduction. The book documents this history as 'remembered' by women who lived through the history.

Processes of modern state building in the region of Bilad al-Sham brought about significant transformations in definitions of health, development of health care systems, and medical practices. I examine three aspects of these changes in this book. First is a gender analysis of ways in which science and medicine in the twentieth century contribute to colonialist processes of state building in the regions addressed. Second, I discuss specific consequences of state building in the region, of war, military occupation, displacement and expulsion, changing socio-economic-political conditions, and changing mores, on women's health. Third, given significant changes introduced in health systems between 1919 and

1990, I explore how select women of the region define health. How do women interact with and affect health care systems as an aspect of state building?

This book is also about the politics of writing history. I approach the subject of women and health as, among other considerations, a study in structures of knowledge. The struggle for control of definitions of health in the period addressed is a struggle for control of knowledge-making. The field of historical research, like all fields, defines what is constituted as 'knowledge.' Historiography is informed by the politics of gender, race, and class that feminist theorists identify as central to how we construct history.

Thus this book also provides a gender, race, class analysis of colonization of the region, utilizing primary source documents which reveal ties between the U.S. and Great Britain in regard to policies impacting women instituted during the Mandate period. Content and methodology contribute to a more complex and useful understanding of the war over Palestine than provided by texts informed by conventional androcentric historiographies.

This book is a contribution to the literature on Palestinian history, on women's history, on refugees, with a focus on the particular experiences of women refugees, and on feminist methodologies. The refugee issue is central to resolution of war in the region. This book approaches this issue from the ground up. It provides a venue for some Palestinian women to communicate their stories and perspectives, and it provides important information on women's organizing- the barriers they face and the barriers they have overcome. My strong belief is that resolution to on-going war in the region is dependent upon reconceptualization of the history utilizing feminist theory. Control of women and reproduction, control of water and resources/economies in the region, are interconnected historical processes that are central to war. Further, information shared by women interviewed in this book, of their historical experience in the course of and after 1948 change the textbook version of the history.

This book puts the war over Palestine into a global context, taking the onus off of 'Israeli' vs. 'Palestinian.' For example, the book cites the work of Patricia Hill Collins to show that Afrocentric feminist theory provides a basis for understanding ways that some Palestinian women create knowledge that fosters resistance. The book uncovers research that links the struggles of African American Granny midwives to the historical experience of Palestinian *daya* and demonstrates that in both cases women utilize multiple knowledge bases (history, politics, healing practices) to create a vision of social organizations supporting women's health and supporting the health of their communities. Thus the book supports networking among a range of communities globally strengthening the work that women do to bring peace and justice to their regions.