

Nefissa Naguib, *Women, Water and Memory:
Recasting Lives in Palestine*

Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2009. pbk. 176 pages

Nefissa Naguib's book is the third in Brill's Women and Gender series. It is an interdisciplinary study comprising an anthropological discussion, social gender theories, and a geographical discussion. The book is primarily based on anthropological research and presents the stories of eight women from the Palestinian village of Musharafah—and by means of which, it creates a discourse that examines the changes that have taken place in the status of women in Palestinian society, and their functioning following the political and economic changes in Palestinian society in general, and in Musharafah in particular. Water is the connecting thread between the stories of the eight women and the analysis of their social functioning in the village.

The extensive preface to the book is part of a long theoretical introduction, in which the author explains that "It is a story about how water is an endlessly evolving enactment of gender, family and community relationships" (1). She reviews the aims of the book in general, provides a general description of the village and its women, and discusses terms—such as "society of women"—which she will use extensively in the book. The second part of the theoretical introduction, entitled "The Women and Their Stories," describes the way of life that is a backdrop for the women's stories, and the importance of water as a component in each story.

The book is comprised of two parts. Part 1, "About Musharafah," includes the first two chapters, which also constitute a theoretical review, and serve as the basis for the anthropological study and analysis in Part 2. In Chapter 1, "Musharafah," the author describes different aspects of the village. She explains the origin of its name, describes how the buildings are mapped out, and provides a historical and geographical survey of the village. The descriptions are accompanied by figures to illustrate the data (43 and 45).

Chapter 2: "Palestine—A Contested Site," discusses important milestones in the development of the Palestinian society and the difficulties with which it is forced to contend. The author draws on the studies of Rashid Khalidi and Rosemary Sayigh, among others. This chapter, too, constitutes the theoretical foundation for the second part of the book.

Part 2: "Life Worlds," is comprised of four chapters in which water and its connection with the women's personal stories is extensively discussed. Chapter 3, "Women, Water and Memory" presents the detailed stories of

eight women from Musharafah. Each story includes an interview with the woman, and in some cases, a photograph of her as well. It is noteworthy that with the exception of the Introduction, this is the book's longest chapter (70–104).

Chapter 4, "Being in the World," presents an analysis of the women's stories and the feminine space revealed in them. The author begins this chapter with an explanation that "Fetching water provided women with a legitimate arena of activity outside the home" (105). This provides the basis for the gender discussion and analysis later in the chapter. The women's functioning in the domestic space emerges from the stories as they fulfill a range of feminine roles—their roles as daughters, wives, mothers, and grandmothers. Going out to fetch water allowed women to go out into the public space and even play an active role in it. By means of the women's stories, the author delves into the world of women in Musharafah, and readers can learn about the life of the women in the village. In this chapter, the author expands the discussion on the institution of marriage, family, and its social structure, and the delicate relationship between the village women against the backdrop of cultural changes and modernization. At the end of the chapter, the author describes the implications of the *intifada* for the society of women, and how they cope with death. It is important to note that in this chapter the author devotes an extensive discussion to the women's perception of Islam, under the title "To Know God,," and explains how the Five Pillars in Islam (*al-arkan al-khamsa*) are manifested in the stories and way of life of the women in Musharafah.

In Chapter 5, "Women and Places Outside," "the attention shifts from the social construction of women to what stories tell us more specifically about water" (125). This chapter connects the book's various circles—gender, society, nationality, and water with its attendant social and cultural importance. The author describes how women experience changes in the water infrastructure that in turn led to other economic changes. Women, especially those of the older generation, feel that it would have been better to continue fetching water since they cannot afford the financial burden of paying for it. Naguib explains that there are social gender reasons as well: "Fetching water involved more than just daily work; it involved 'being with the world'. . . . Furthermore, fetching water involved negotiation between women about how to cope with daily life in the village" (126–27). The final chapter, Chapter 6, "Telling Stories," emphasizes the importance of stories in shaping memory and discusses how anthropological and historical research meet. The author further enriches the discussion in this chapter with research literature.

In the conclusion of the book, the author addresses the question of how to write about other women, and discusses the importance of understanding the cultural background in order to comprehend the social codes presented in the book. By means of her extensive theoretical review as an introduction to the practical part of her book, Naguib unquestionably helps readers gain a better understanding of the society and culture she addresses in it. It is rich with concepts drawn from Muslim terminology that are interspersed in Arabic with English transliteration throughout the book, and also includes a glossary of terms (vii) and an index (169–173). Thus, the book will appeal to researchers of culture, the Middle East, and gender—as well as to laypeople who wish to learn about what goes on deep within the society of women in the Palestinian village of Musharafah. The author provides a peek into these personal lives that constitute a microcosm of the Palestinian society of women.

This book greatly contributes to the inquiry into the world of women in the Middle East, and to the construction of a women’s discourse, which shapes collective Palestinian memory founded on women’s narratives that tell the story of those whose voices have not yet been heard. Through the women’s attitude to water, we learn about the life of women and codes of social behavior. We can also learn about the role Palestinian women play in the national struggle. The book contributes to the advancement of research on Palestinian women, and in this, Naguib achieves what she aspires to in her introduction: “That women’s daily struggles in war zones should receive more academic coverage” (33).

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