

Maya Rosenfeld.**Confronting the Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp.**

Stanford University Press, 2004, 408 pp.

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"The 1948 War and its aftermath — which saw Palestinians uprooted from their homes and land, dispersed, and scattered — shattered the social history of individuals and communities alike. In the decades that followed the war, the Palestinians in exile struggled with the ordeals of refugee existence." With this paragraph, sociologist Maya Rosenfeld opens her finely detailed voluminous account of Palestinian life in Dheisheish, one of the several refugee camps in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. By providing historical, political, sociological, and economic data gathered from Israeli, Palestinian, non-governmental and international non-governmental sources alongside richly documented ethnographic accounts and life histories, Rosenfeld presents a comprehensive account of the formidable struggles that Palestinian refugees encounter. But this is not simply a victimology. Among the ruins, Rosenfeld portrays individual and collective resistance, humour, persistence — all narratives of survival.

Rosenfeld tells us that she first visited the camp in the summer of 1987 as a journalist but that soon after she became actively involved "as a member of an Israeli protest movement and of a human rights organization". She returned in the 1990s to conduct her field research for her doctorate in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Rosenfeld's intimate commitment and engagement flows in the words she writes.

Dheisheh Refugee Camp is an optimum case study. Located south of Bethlehem, the camp houses more than 11,000 in an area no more than a half-square kilometer. Founded soon after the war in 1948, this is one of the oldest refugee camps in the region and resembles many others. Housing, while limited, is also dated, dilapidated, cramped, and poorly insulated. Infrastructure is meager, with open sewers and frequent water shortages. The presence of the Israeli army since the late 1980s has meant concrete walls and high wire fences block and mark entrance and exit zones, enclosing the camp inhabitants.

While such facts are fairly well known, it is Rosenfeld's documentary sense that is most revealing. While she is "most impressed by the intensity and articulation of political life in the camp", Rosenfeld is interested to demonstrate the "central place of the family and of familialism in the social life of the camp."

Those interested in some of the more conventional issues posed by development theorists will find Part One, "Occupation, Day Wage Labour, and Family Life in Dheisheh," and Part Two, "Occupation, Education, Employment, and Family Life in Dheisheh" particularly worthy of note, especially because Rosenfeld asks important questions about family and gender dynamics. The most compelling chapters are in Part Three, "Occupation, Political Imprisonment, Politicization, and Family Life in Dheisheh," for it is here that Rosenfeld confronts the questions that drew her to the

camp in the first place.

She writes: "My early encounters with former prisoners and prisoners' families provided clear enough evidence that political imprisonment of Dheisheh residents was not confined to periods of marked upheaval and unrest but rather was a widespread phenomenon throughout the era of Occupation. I realized then that while political activism took place principally within the context of modern organizations and parties -- formations that in general promoted non-kin-based ties and affiliations -- its consequences, in the form of political imprisonment, had a profound impact on family life and family relationships." Having documented the consequences of imprisonment and closure on employment opportunities and economic hardships and their effects on households, it is in the final section of the book that "'passive' prisoners take center stage." Rosenfeld writes that "as many as 85 percent of Dheishehian families have experienced the imprisonment of at least one family member, as many as 60 percent have experienced the imprisonment of two or more members. Thus, political imprisonment has had a direct bearing on the daily lives of the great majority of families in the camp." She argues, "the scope of political imprisonment in each age cohort, together with the findings on the personal, social, and generational backgrounds of activists and prisoners, portray a microcosm -- albeit one of some unique Dheishehian features -- of a much broader historical process: that of the emergence and consolidation of the Palestinian national movement in the West Bank."

Careful and ethically-astute research directs not only the questions but the findings Rosenfeld shares with us. Most creatively, she conveys the degree to which imprisonment of large numbers of men and boys has meant a shift in gender roles with women taking up additional responsibilities, including sustaining networks of prisoners' families. She asks if these new roles might also lead to a process that could "undermine patriarchal family relations, and hence be translated into social gains?" If I had one criticism of Rosenfeld's analysis, it would be on this point, and though I think it is a minor one, it alerts us to more serious gaps in feminist research in conflict zones, and particularly in those areas where social scientists are still prone to using words like 'tradition' and 'patriarchy' as tropes for describing the cultural practices of (as-yet?) "un-emancipated" men and women. With new Palestinian feminist research and writing emerging almost weekly, and clearly having an impact at the local and regional level, politically as well as socially, this seems a rather moot point. Still, I would want to know if women's public practices are indeed interpreted by them to be "emancipatory" rather than an extension of their already-complex caretaker roles in the family. Are these not more excruciatingly oppressive practices that they endure because they are facing a more dangerous "public" sphere? Accordingly, it would be useful to know if prisoners feel "emasculated" either by their terms of imprisonment and/or the political and social roles that women play in their community. Parenthetically, I would also ask if questions about Palestinian and Israeli women's emancipation would not be better posed in the context of the entire conflict and its increasingly militarized form. Israeli feminists Nahla Abdo and Ronit Lentin, Susan Sered, Simona Sharoni, and Ella Shohat have certainly made those strong links.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the social and political effects of Israeli military occupation of the West Bank but I would certainly not limit it to that area of analysis. It would also serve as a useful text to those interested in family and gender studies, peace and conflict studies, labour studies, human rights and political prisoner research. In a myriad of ways,

Confronting the Occupation makes an important and unique contribution to all of these overlapping and complex areas of inquiry.

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