

## Dancing Under the House: Woman & Absence in Israel

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**Abstract** *This feminist participatory ethnography reflexively examines constraints on women in Palestinian culture in Northern Israel, as typified by differences in space, volume, musical rhythm, costume, convenience and honour. Observations were conducted at a *haflab*, or wedding party, held over several days, and subsequently through follow-up. The article does not essentialise Palestinian culture or undermine Arab women: the ethnographer's inclusion into the family paradoxically permitted her an "inside" perspective where both Palestinians and Israelis could (or would) not go. In Israel's margins within margins, the lives of Arab Muslim women lie farthest from the nucleus of power. Literally dancing under the house also symbolically elided the bodies of women with the house, its foundations, sub-terrain, and hidden spaces, locating the domestic beneath or beyond the view of men. A small plastic doll performed as a simulacrum of traditional Palestinian femaleness and domesticity in which women are best kept unseen. The article incorporates traditional storytelling, Prophetic hadith, and contemporary Palestinian poetry.*

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My wife has never left the house except to be carried to her grave."  
T. Canaan<sup>1</sup>

### Invitation

*You most dear one are invited to the joining together in the sight of the people in grace and happiness [the invitation read] of the son of Ibrahim, who is son of Abu, namely Ahmed, and the daughter of Mohammed, who is son of Mohar, namely Jana, blessed be He Mohammed, in the gracious company of yourself which we request at the place of public gathering in Nazareth. We will be honoured at your attendance [the ornate speech continued], with your own blessed family may they continue in health, these days of this month, etc., without whose presence we cannot express our joy, etc. etc.*

It was an ordinary invitation to a Muslim Palestinian<sup>2</sup> wedding and *haflab* (wedding party), hand-delivered,<sup>3</sup> unusual only for its mention of the bride's name. The high Arabic of the invitation, with effusive blessings and invocations (some omitted here), was sincere; gold scalloping on heavy cardstock produced the requisite display of prosperity. The white envelope indicated the family's actual wealth, sporting three pink-toned photographs of a lavish banquet, an enormous floral arrangement and a sea of empty chairs. For my benefit, Ibrahim had rendered the invitation into Hebrew as well, misspelling only the word for bride. As this article demonstrates, that small, inadvertent flaw was symptomatic, even axiomatic, of Islamic women's traditions and

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<sup>1</sup>Albeit written in 1931, these words were invoked in an essay republished in 1993 (Shokeid 1993: 438).

<sup>2</sup>"Palestinian" is a problematic designation indicating the impossibility of writing about Israel without invoking the political. In the daily changing climate of Oslo accords, Hebron resettlement, joint rule between PNA and IDF (Palestinian National Authority and Israeli Defense Forces), *jihad*, torture and terrorism—naïvely called "the peace process"—individuals adopt different nomenclature. Even Arabic libraries do not standardize terminology. One practice is to name Arabs in the North and uncontested territories "Israeli Arabs," and Arabs in Aza and the West Bank "Palestinians." I use the terms by which my informants identify themselves.

<sup>3</sup>Printed invitations are relatively new, but even today in the Galilee are hand-carried; an invitation Gorkin received was hand-carried, "as was typical, delivered to their own invited guests." (Gorkin 1993, p. 141).

histories, and the experiences of this bride in her wedding week.<sup>4</sup>

While central to my discussion, my experience of the bride's invited absence, embodied within my own disruption of gendered roles, rests alongside a luscious evocation and celebration of Palestinian custom, culture, and constraint. I do not mean to undermine Palestinian women by instituting another kind of presence in this participant-observer account. My entry into the ceremony depended upon actions (not concepts) explained and interrogated throughout this article: the confluence of personal intention and allowable transgression, the appearance of the Other as Same, and the perhaps eternal problem in ethnography of being simultaneously inside and outside, one whose research is best served when objectivity is most compromised.

### *Haflah*

Held on two consecutive nights, the formal Muslim wedding and *haflah* introduced a festive air into a normally quiet Galilean village. Nightly the town square resounded with the beating of drums, rhythmic clapping of hands, voices lifted in song and ululation, feet stomping in dust, dung and discarded husks of sunflower and pistachio. In the transformation from marketplace to party place the open circle of the *suq* (market) inverted from a site for public, secular and pecuniary transactions to one for private, sacred and corporeal actions. The transaction's financial element would not be openly discussed,<sup>5</sup> but guests would bring gifts of crisp bills in white envelopes.<sup>6</sup> Taking his opportunity to proclaim the groom's place in the *hamula* (family clan) and village at large, the groom's father privately informed me he was prepared to sacrifice twenty-five sheep.

One of three non-Arabs present<sup>7</sup> at a party for hundreds, I was conscious of events which brought me here along sheer unmarked roads, on which even my native driver was several times lost; of goats and donkeys grazing the hills where plastic bags sprouted in the cotton; of Bedouin families at tea in ramshackle roadside tents; of the eyes of strangers, quizzical, shy, bold or warm with recognition, upon recalling my last visit. Upon arrival, I was automatically divided from my male escort, and led to the *harim* (women's section) where female bodies pressed together, sticky from the heat and dancing.<sup>8</sup> I drew in thick smells of sheep cooking in yoghurt and rice, wood smoke and excrement, and over all, waves of sweat, cheap spray cologne and American cigarettes.<sup>9</sup> Struggling to the centre of the *harim* through concentric rows of white

<sup>4</sup> On wedding customs in the Galilee, see Rob K. Baum, "Painting the Missing Bride of Galilee," *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 30/2 (April 1999), 177-201.

<sup>5</sup> Jewish weddings maintain a moment of undisguised finance, when the groom announces the bride's worth—stating the sum he will allot in the event he leaves her. This protects the bride's family, which in ancient times had to take her back. It is popular now to proclaim either an outrageously high sum or one symbolically related to the bride or bridal party, such as the date of the couple's first meeting.

<sup>6</sup> These envelopes are not to be confused with the *sadaq* (dowry). In earlier times gifts of money were brought openly by hand (not hidden in envelopes) and each gift announced to the assembly as received.

<sup>7</sup> I was accompanied by an Israeli Jewish couple (heterosexual), also friends of the Arab Muslim host.

<sup>8</sup> From this word (*harim*) issues the West's word—but not reality—of "harem." *Harim* was adopted into English as a term for the kept women of a sheikh, or prince. While the concept of a secluded site for procurement and enjoyment of women is a production of Western minds, Hasan el-Turabi says: "Segregation is definitely not part of Islam. The *hareem* quarters, this is a development...totally unknown in the model of Islam, or in the text of Islam;" see S. Altorki and C. F. El-Solh (Eds.), *Arab Women in the Field: Studying your own Society* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 36. *Harim* linguistically and geographically designates separate quarters used by women to dress, groom themselves and raise children. The concept therefore has historical basis as a means of separating *all* women from men's bodies, verified by Bukhsh when he mourns the golden age of Islam, loss of the good old ways and "decline of the *hareem* system [an] inexorable seclusion of women:" S. K. Bukhsh, *Marriage and Family Life Among the Arabs* (Lahore: Qureshi Art Press, 1927), 45.

<sup>9</sup> I am aware that some readers will find my descriptions exotic, and perhaps therefore offensive. It is a tired truth that if one lives in a place it ceases to feel exotic, but a phenomenological description of a foreign place (or any place) may by its nature evoke otherness. The alternative, which I find repugnant, is to so dilute the experience that it becomes banal. My work is deeply influenced by the poetics of place, in which local sensibilities remain endemic to the landscape; for readings in this method I suggest Roger Abrahams, "Towards an Enactment-Centered Theory of Folklore," ed. W. Bascom (1977), *Frontiers of Folklore* (Colorado: Westview); G. Bachelard (1964), *The Poetics of*

plastic chairs, lap upon infant-heavy lap, I reached the inner circle of five dancers and joined them. I saw how instantly the group parted to accommodate but also to watch me, the only Western woman dancing with them.<sup>10</sup> With a movement of head and wrist I invited the women to rejoin me, heard the drumming intensify as we weaved together in the tiny space,<sup>11</sup> and felt my heart leap with joy.

Until sometime after midnight women and men celebrated separately, in spheres defined by gender, age and honour. In the spirit of containment permeating Islamic *hadith* (moral codes), women were relegated to a close inner courtyard in Ibrahim's *ban* (family compound) where we danced, clapped, sang, held sleeping and feeding babies, and disappeared at intervals to help cook or serve the many guests. Habituated from Euro-American weddings to praising the bride's face, hair, costume and composure, I watched eagerly for the woman we feted, but was disappointed: the bride-to-be was absent. Carefully secreted from the groom, she did not appear even in this space. Given the already rigid physical gender separations, her absence exceeded practicality, performing instead as a simulacrum of traditional Palestinian femalehood in which women are best kept unseen, protecting their honour from rumour and their men from annoyance. As is written in the *hadith* of al-Bukhari, The Prophet said: "The dog, the ass, and woman interrupt prayer if they pass in front of the believer, interposing themselves between him and the *qibla*."<sup>12</sup> Compare, however, "Bukhari's key Hadith in which the Prophet stresses the fact that the mosques of Allah are not forbidden to women" (Mernissi 1993: 82). *Hadith* are the structure by which people measure their lives; here women are compared with dogs and donkeys, whose interruptive force presents an obstacle for faith.<sup>13</sup>

Veils, curtains, doors and physical absence ensure a bride's separation from outside influences on her wedding day. Seclusion also traditionally prevents an endangering appearance, particularly during the bride's transition from virgin to married woman, or in the passing of protection from father to husband. In 1914 the anthropologist Edward Westermarck wrote of the Moroccan Arabs: "It is believed that misfortune would befall any person or animal the bride

*Space*, M. Jolas, Trans. (NY: Orion); J. Clifford (1986), *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California); DS S. Miall (Ed.) (1982), *Metaphor, Problems and Perspectives* (Sussex: Harvester).

<sup>10</sup> There was one non-Arab woman present.

<sup>11</sup> On the special configuration of religious space, see D. Chidester (1997), "The Poetics and Politics of Sacred Space: Towards a Critical Phenomenology of Religion," *Analecta Husserliana*, XLIII, ed. A-T. Tymienieck. 211-231.

<sup>12</sup> The *Qibla* is the Muslim's sacred and physical orientation toward the place of Ka'ba as a site of prayer—a way for Muslims to situate themselves in the world. The similarity to earlier (and current) Jewish spiritual orientation is intentional: initially Muhammad also faced Jerusalem for divine sanction. El Mernissi adds, "Behind this change of direction...[this] about-face [to Ka 'ba]...lies the genius of Islam as the most clever expression of Arab nationalism" (Mernissi 1993, p. 66).

<sup>13</sup> In response to a reviewer requesting more precise reporting on the location of the *hadith*: *From Bukhari Vol. 1, #490, Narrated 'Aisha*: "The things which annul the prayers were mentioned before me. They said, "Prayer is annulled by a dog, a donkey and a woman (if they pass in front of the praying people)." I said, "You have made us (i.e. women) dogs. I saw the Prophet praying while I used to lie in my bed between him and the Qibla. Whenever I was in need of something, I would slip away, for I disliked to face him."

*From Muslim Number 1032, Abu Dharr reported*: The Messenger of 'Allah said: When any one of you stands for prayer and there is a thing before him equal to the back of the saddle that covers him and in case there is not before him (a thing) equal to the back of the saddle, his prayer would be cut off by (passing of an) ass, woman, and black Dog. I said: O Abu Dharr, what feature is there in a black dog which distinguish it from the red dog and the yellow dog? He said: O, son of my brother, I asked the Messenger of Allah as you are asking me, and he said: The black dog is a devil.

*From Abu Dawud Number 0704, Narrated Abdullah ibn Abbas*: Ikrimah reported on the authority of Ibn Abbas, saying: I think the Apostle of Allah said: When one of you prays without a sutrah, a dog, an ass, a pig, a Jew, a Magian, and a woman cut off his prayer, but it will suffice if they pass in front of him at a distance of over a stone's throw.

"Silas," an online source on the Quran, more diplomatically comments: "These hadith state that if a dog passes in front of people praying it annuls their prayer. Annul means, "to reduce to nothing", or "to make ineffective or inoperative". If a group of people are praying and a dog walks in-between them and the Kaba (in Mecca), then their prayer is made null and void." [http://www.answerislam.org/Silas/dogs.htm#\\_Toc158088968](http://www.answerislam.org/Silas/dogs.htm#_Toc158088968), Accessed 3 March, 2011.

looked at before she has seen her husband on her arrival at his house”—a liminality so unstable it’s “blinding” (Westermarck p.140, 169). “Blinding,” he said, not “binding.” I wondered whether such old traditions, or merely the influence of Christian pre-nuptial separation, had influenced this family, and whether the family of the bride was blind to her own desires.

Mernissi has written evocatively (and provocatively) of the difficulties of being a woman in this culture. I find it curious that to this day, despite the ethnographies of such courageous Arab women, and my own ethnographic experiences, Arab male academics insist that “women are cherished in Arab cultures,” and that our interrogation of gender difference shows a lack of perception. Are we dishonourable because we note what we have seen? After this *haflab* I found myself asking what it means to be “cherished” by men. What is the role of women? Does choice play a part in her actions? Can she refuse a cultural imperative? The invitation to the wedding, so elaborate with its colour reproduction of festive flowers, held an ironic clue: sadly, the wedding invitation’s Hebrew translation reduced this Muslim woman from a bride (*calab*) to something easy (*kalab*). It was no doubt a wholly unintentional mistake (and one I would never mention to my hosts), but suggested to me something of the ambivalence<sup>14</sup> and (as the *hadith* suggests) distrust with which Arab men view unmarried women. Escaping whoredom,<sup>15</sup> the bride would enter marriage as a daughter, daughter-in-law, wife and eventually mother of men—serving them in the family *han* (the home), traditionally the sphere in which she could gain recognition unchallenged by family, *hamula* or neighbours (Abu-Hanna 1994, p.125; Shaaban 1988, p.71). Her own desires would remain poorly spoken and badly written (if at all), misspelled in the margins of her new family’s history.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. Gender differences

Ibrahim<sup>17</sup> told me that he invited only “close friends”—which meant about a thousand people—to witness this family contract. Arranged by parents while the children were still young,<sup>18</sup> this

<sup>14</sup> Westermarck states: “When [a wedding] is contracted on behalf of a woman who is no longer in her father’s power, it is necessary that she should give her consent to it, either in express terms, or, if she be a virgin; at least by implication; in the latter case *her silence or laugh is construed to imply consent*” (Westermarck 1914, p. 15—my emphasis). On gender in sex roles in Isarel, compare: Moshe Shokeid, *Ethnic Identity and the Position of Women Among Arabs in an Israeli Town Women in Israel, Studies of Israeli Society*, Vol. VI, eds. Y. Azmon and D. N. Izraeli (1993), (NY: Transaction Pubs.), 423-464; M. Gorkin and R. Othman (1996), *Three Mothers, Three Daughters: Palestinian Women’s Stories* (Berkeley: University of California), 77-82. On women’s status in Israel see M. P. Safir and B. Swirski (1991), *Calling the Equality: Bluff: Women in Israel* (NY: Pergamon).

<sup>15</sup> There are, of course, other recourses for Muslim women than marriage and prostitution. In traditional Muslim practice, however, to become a “public woman” was indeed to be seen as a whore; women traveling alone in Islamic countries (as well as in Jerusalem) are still perceived as “available” for or soliciting of male pleasure. I mean to distinguish between the remarkable rights accorded women in Islam, and the *actual*, lived oppression of women in Arab countries. In one edition of a Jordanian television program produced in Canada, Muslim women describe emancipatory strategies that brought them to, or kept them in, Islam. Many of those interviewed are North American-born converts, possibly accounting for the degree of overtly expressed feminism. See *Islam TV International, Canada* (aired 13 January 1997).

<sup>16</sup> I agree with Gorkin and Othman, who write: “Palestinian women, once almost forgotten in Middle Eastern historic accounts, and even “herstory” accounts, have recently begun to receive some attention...Yet within this growing literature the authentic and varied voices of Palestinian women have been inadequately portrayed. Indeed, it seems to us that a strange paradox has occurred: in the conscientious effort to put these women on the social and political map, the personal texture of individual lives has been lost. In short, Palestinian Women have been given a voice, but the individual Palestinian woman, is still, in the main, voiceless” (1996, p. 1).

<sup>17</sup> Names of individuals and sites are altered in accordance with standard anthropological practice. The *haflab* took place in Northern Israel in a village internally defined as Palestinian Arab (not Israeli or Druze). Western influences might therefore be stronger in this community than among people in Aza.

<sup>18</sup> These days, accorded more mobility and social options, young people are often permitted to marry for love, but families recognize the importance of a “good” marriage as one that unites families rather than destroys them; similarly, *Haredi* Jews maintain marital arrangements by necessity due to gender separations. Weddings are traditionally arranged as early as birth (*atijet il-jora*, literally “a gift from the pit”), and held as soon as the female is

liaison did not culminate an affair but begin one, merging two powerful families for the continuance of village harmony, family, financial security and moral values. In the *Mahgreb* as a whole, “the closer the relationship, the more satisfactory the marriage...” (Holy 1989,p.21).<sup>19</sup> The groom was one of five children to be married by arrangement, his father a respected sub-contractor for Israelis. A *bayt* (house) had already been built in the village and prepared for the son and his wife-to-be; the bride would make a good Muslim wife, adopting her husband’s family’s customs, keeping the *dar*, raising children and maintaining his home. Not coincidentally, the term *dar* infers both house and lineage.

By today’s standards, the *lelat il binna* (henna night) was comparatively large. Families in the Middle East are as prey to economic considerations as those in the West, and while it would be unthinkable to exclude a family member no matter how remote, the *hamula* already comprises five generations.) The ritual *binna* (wedding party)—especially the bride’s evening party (Shiloah 1974, p.268)—was once at least three days long and often seven (Stillman 1979, p.7).<sup>20</sup> *Hinna* takes its name from the herbal dye (pulverised leaves of *Lawsonia inermis*, or Egyptian privet) used to colour the hands and nails and sometimes feet. Where once women’s hands and faces received henna, now usually only the right hand is coloured on women and men, a generalised good luck talisman.<sup>21</sup> Henna’s symbolic origins do not reside in good luck: because of its resemblance to blood, henna was a symbolic appeasement to ward off bad spirits. Significantly, the blood to which henna refers is specifically female: brides’ hands are stained as an antidote to post-pregnancy barrenness, believed to be the result of contact with a menstruating woman (Bailey 1991, p.118). By employing the “sympathetic magic” of simulating menstrual blood,<sup>22</sup> brides protect their own fertility.

The word for the wedding ceremony thus collapses into the word for dyeing, metaphor for metaphor, and stain for stain. Red frames the wedding period, appearing as *henna* at the beginning of the wedding and at its end in the form of a bloodstained sheet. (There are variations in this custom nowadays, but the sheet is often still ritually displayed.) Red symbolises the blood cycle (albeit in reverse, invoking fertility before virginity), signifying brood value. In the Galilee, guests traditionally continue the party, carousing loudly until the telltale sheet is displayed, whereupon absence of blood is synonymous with absence of honour.<sup>23</sup> Private acts of penetration, sometimes handled by senior woman family members at the wedding, are thus publicly revealed.<sup>24</sup> A wedding without this red frame is cause for shame and annulment of not only marriage but also family bonds: I still hear stories of brides sent home from their own weddings, outcast despite relatives pleading to let them stay with the groom’s family even a few weeks in order to spare their own family’s honour. Girls arriving home in this way are sometimes murdered by male family members, resolving a breach of honour.<sup>25</sup> The Palestinian

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considered reproductive. When a girl is pre-menstrual (linked with reproductive capacity), the wedding is held but not consummated until onset. Girls married at eight may become mothers at 12 or earlier.

<sup>19</sup> See also G. Tillion (1983), *The Republic of Cousins: Women’s Oppression in Mediterranean Society* (London: Al Saqi Books), and M. Abdul-Rauf (1972), *Marriage in Islam, a Manual* (NY: Exposition).

<sup>20</sup> Conducting work in a different Galilean village, Gorkin (1993) notes that parties on two consecutive nights have become normal. Because of economic and political difficulties in the West Bank and Aza, large parties there are out of fashion; see C. Bailey 1991.

<sup>21</sup> On the use of henna and other vehicles as propitiation and blessing, see J. L. Burckhard (1967), *Notes on the Bedouins and Wababys, Collected During his Travels in the East* (NY: Johnson Reprint).

<sup>22</sup> Westermarck suggests a linguistic connection between *henna* and protection, noting the similarity between the pronunciation of “henna” as *lhanna*, and *lhana*, or “quietness;” Westermarck 1914, p.190, and the Berber *aman* or “water;” compared with the Arabic *aman*, or “safety” (p. 136).

<sup>23</sup> In modern times the practice of waiting outside the nuptial chamber for blood “evidence” is sometimes negotiable: Gorkin (1993) notes that now the groom’s mother may not come for the sheet until morning.

<sup>24</sup> On the dichotomy of public and private in Arab worlds see A. Rasam (1984), “Toward a Theoretical Framework for the Study of Women in the Arab World,” *Social Science Research and Women in the Arab World*. (London: Frances Pinter Pubs), 122-138.

<sup>25</sup> This custom is more common in Aza and Southern Israel, and can be confirmed by reading local newspapers.

folk proverbs<sup>26</sup> that follow clarify the relationship of females to society:

*If your sister dies, your honour is protected.*

*The honest woman is like a tiger and the man is a dog.*

*The honourable beautiful woman walks between two rows of men.*

Laws of separation govern in Islam, such as use of space, customarily gendered among Palestinian Arabs.<sup>27</sup> On this night men and women were clearly separated, the men dancing in a wide and roofless public space, ringed by a large wall (the village's central courtyard) and the women dancing in a low-roofed and un-walled area (Ibrahim's private courtyard)—literally dancing under the house. This reflects the notion of *harim* (in English, harem), the women's space. According to Mernissi, the exotic overtones reflect a misunderstanding:

*Women belong to interior space, the harim, forbidden space...*

*We see that the word harim in fact expresses an idea of threshold, of boundary, of separation between two territories. It is rooted in the idea of space as a field linked to life (sexuality) and death (war), the ability to defend oneself and to protect. It is a threshold which organizes the universe and distributes beings in space, according to their relationships to power, their power to kill and to defend thresholds. Islam is one of the few religions to have erected the differences between the sexes into a social architecture (Mernissi 1993: 65-66).*

Compared to the open area up the street where men danced side-by-side, the women's area was closed-in and cramped. An inner circle with room for six women, generally composed of family members, was obligated to keep the party going. Several small girls joined me in dancing, one adopting me for the evening; I also danced with Ibrahim's sisters, cousins, daughters, grandchildren and even his mother (Ahmed's grandmother). Her mother (Ahmed's great grandmother, in her late 80s) swayed in tempo, and later surprised me by letting loose in the great circle. Age and physical aptitude are not as confining as in the West: those seen elsewhere as unfit or elderly continue to dance in public, and can be quite as rambunctious as younger party-goers.

Within the men's circle there was empty space for hundreds. Although not permitted to dance with them, I was allowed to view the men from the margins of the town square. Conversely, no male was allowed to enter female space or watch us dance. Thus I was confronted by the symbolic weight of gender difference and polarities between the domestic sphere of women and public sphere of men, even as I challenged those distinctions through my female presence. Anthropologists writing from within their birth cultures, sometimes called "indigenous anthropologists," cannot pretend to misread linguistic and cultural signs because or despite of an increased access to them.<sup>28</sup> Ironically, the ability to freely traverse separations between male and female spaces was accorded to someone already marginal—an outsider and a woman. Arab women hold least political import or recourse<sup>29</sup> in Israel, where the militaries take

<sup>26</sup> All the proverbs quoted in this text are taken from Abu-Hanna, who comments: "One will not find a more cruel and a more sick attitude towards women than in the previous proverbs. Thus we believe that the mentality which produced them should be changed" (Abu-Hanna 1994, p. 125).

<sup>27</sup> Granqvist's description of a similar wedding *baflab* in the 1930s demonstrates the continuous tradition of gender separation: "The dance continues till late in the night; the women dance alone, and the men dance alone...(T)he separation is not complete; they hear each others' voices, now one and now another young man creeps in secret to look at the girls and women dancing in the bridegroom's house...it is a dance for the sake of dancing, where each sex dances by itself" (Granqvist 1935, p. 37).

<sup>28</sup> Feminist Arab ethnographer S. Altorki candidly confirms her own limitations as an indigenous anthropologist, admitting that to appropriately conduct research she must knowingly transgress cultural customs (and accept the punishment): S. Altorki and C. F. El-Solh, Eds. (1988), *Arab Women in the Field: Studying your own Society* (New York: Syracuse University).

<sup>29</sup> In Israel less space, resources and notice is also allotted to Jewish female participants than that accorded to Jewish males. In order to verify female status under Islam it is necessary to read the works of modern Arab women, (listed in my bibliography); see also O.A. Najjar with K. Warnock (1992), *Portraits of Palestinian Women* (Salt Lake: University of Utah). Although there are exceptional male writers, many Arab men are understandably invested in maintaining the inequality upon which their homo-social economy depends. I qualify this point in response to the anonymous Arab male historian who demanded my ethnographic work not be published, calling the treatment of women I described

national and social priority. My hosts appeared to courteously accept my actions as a trespass—unfeminine, un-Arab and non-Muslim, derived outside the rules of proper deportment but within those allowed a *liminoid* guest, as if I were a boy. (This is not to infer that Muslim girls are allowed the transgression or liminality of space and movement accorded to boys.) The radical differences of a solitary, non-indigenous ethnographer—particularly a woman—may make her palatable to the population. Too dissimilar to be held to the same standards of behaviour, I represented a world so foreign that the power to convert or sexually aggress seemed neutralised, ceasing to endanger (their) Arab women.<sup>30</sup>

Rhythm and melody are also gendered, though this distinction is usually made in terms of embodiment, for instance as expressed in dance. Providing our own music, playing a simple *masmudi* rhythm for the individualistic, improvisational dancing that sprang into the circle, women took turns on one of the *durbekhab* (hourglass-shaped drums) placed on a leg and beaten by hand. I knew that just down the street from us a professional singer, hired months before for the men's entertainment, had arrived with heavy amplifiers and several professional musicians. In the square the men alternated between rhythms of greater complexity, accompanying male dancers in the *sagbi* (a slow movement) and *dubka* (a fast step which displays dancers' virtuosity).<sup>31</sup> The men's music continued for hours with tiny breaks for the singer to refresh himself or move his microphone; listening and watching, at times I found it impossible to tell whether the man was singing or the performance were pre-recorded. By contrast, the women's drumming ended without warning when our principal drummer became tired, and resumed when someone sat down to take her place.

Men's and women's attire is strongly differentiated. A few men wore the traditional male robe of *gabiye* (gown), *hizam* and *kafiyeh*, with its black double-ringed *aqal* (headcord). Senior in the *hamula*, these men did not leave the house but lounged comfortably on the carpeted and cushioned floor, as is customary. Showing the absence of men under the house (and perhaps the modernising influences of life among Israelis, the Lebanese,<sup>32</sup> Euro-American encroachment, and cable television), none of the women present were veiled (covering the face). But like my informant Masudah, most of the middle generation of women wore the traditional, long-skirted *thob* (female garment) with a *hizam* (belt) at the waist and *kafiyeh* or *mendil* (headscarf), completely covering their hair. The major innovation was a lack of head coverings among middle generations of women aged twenty-five to forty (those present with their own children, parents and grandparents), an example of a disruption that begins as domestic transgression and transmutes into public habit.

Although styles are at great variance throughout the state, Palestinian females are less likely to wear the version of Western sexuality seen predominantly on Israeli adolescent females (then black spandex leggings, tight crop-tops, four-inch clunky black heels, orange hair, black-rimmed lips and black-lacquered nails). Yet only one woman present—the Israeli—wore trousers. This was patently masculine wear, and in this context seemed to symbolise the West's inconsideration for others' customs. Young girls tended towards colonial attire: plaid dresses resembling English school uniforms, their bodices sparkly with gold buttons, and jackets embellished with epaulettes, bows, crests and other decorations. Children attend evening parties despite the late hour, and dance with or watch the adults in accordance with their own age and gender. Young boys might stay with the women, or move back and forth between women's and

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a fabrication, as "women are cherished in Arab society": I would not otherwise have known this information was not broadly apparent. For an assessment of Palestinian women's status in Israel see L. Taraki (1995), "Society and Gender in Palestine: International Agency Policy Documents," *Gender and Society Working Paper #2: Gender and Public Policy*, (Birzeit University: Women's Studies Program), 37-66.

<sup>30</sup> I do not imply that this radical foreignness is peculiar to the ethnographer in Muslim society; I had a similar experience when researching among Orthodox Jewish *Mizrachi* women, the subject of another article.

<sup>31</sup> For a general description of song genre and variations see Shiloah 1974.

<sup>32</sup> During my first visit, in 1986, I discovered that some brothers had fled Israel for Lebanon, to escape prison.

men's spaces, thus representing a gender as indifferently or ambiguously perceived as my own.

It is symptomatic of Western studies of non-Western cultures to dichotomise, particularly with qualifiers historically imagined as oppositional (i.e., male/female, public/private, outsider/insider). These terms expose what Monique Wittig (1992) labels "the straight mind," a motive to colonise cultures by limiting languages used to describe them. Xenophobic generalisations can be avoided by replacement with culturally specific definition. There is a perhaps equally pernicious danger of rewriting history to reflect notions of political correctness or fulfil reader expectation. This auto-ethnography, a phenomenology of absence, pertains to a single *haflab* and its own cultural history; I do not interpret culture at large, or replace the bride by constructing another kind of presence,<sup>33</sup> and I mean to acknowledge Orientalism without falling prey to Occidentalism. Once a researcher articulates a subject-object position she is necessarily "outside" even if previously "inside"; qualitative analysis requires that distance. As a non-Palestinian female conducting feminist ethnography in Israel I work cognisant of my apartness, needing to maintain that apartness (which I call being "enough outside") as a professional tool and as a strength. This affords the ability to investigate custom without over-entrenchment.

One of the women I met, Nawal, is an excellent example of an Arab woman simultaneously within and without her culture. From my first glance, I could see that Nawal was different from other women at the *haflab* in dress, speech and bearing. I did not mention this but only noted this silently to myself—yet, and within moments, a swift and silent transaction took place among the men, and Nawal was delegated to serve the three Jewish guests. Later she spoke of her own "outsideness," of her husband Ahram's advanced education and sophistication, and the trouble this had caused his parents when unable to find him a suitable wife in the village. As the proverb cryptically states, "A beautiful wife is an obstacle to her husband." Ahram had married first outside the village, a bond that dissolved shortly after the European wife "came home" with him, found out what "home" was, and left him to it. Nawal, his present and only wife, had some outside education, previously a hindrance in her own parents' search for an appropriate mate for their daughter. She was eventually chosen by Ibrahim's *hamula* for her intelligence, but because of it not entirely welcomed: the village women would always reject her for having pretended to a masculine domain. Nawal's story, though unusual, is not singular. Eventually Westernised Arabs either stop going home or abandon the language and affects of their other.<sup>34</sup> (Or course this also happens with other cultures, and in other parts of the world.)

For many Israelis, Palestinian Muslim culture is not only alien but also "enemy": the otherness of Muslim and Christian Palestinians for (predominantly Jewish) Israelis<sup>35</sup> is a global issue of great political concern. In writing about otherness<sup>36</sup> one may avoid political stances, but the writing of ethnography in politicised areas becomes a part of what one writes about and locates the one who writes it. In Israel, the site of almost 6,000 years of cultural conquest and

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<sup>33</sup> On the (mis)representation of "other" women, see J. Robinson (1994), *White Women Researching/ Representing 'Others': From Apartheid to Postcolonialism?* *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, A. Blunr and G. Rose (NY: Guilford), 197-226.

<sup>34</sup> Few Palestinian Arabs emigrate from their family homes; of those who do, most return. Compare the earlier studies of Moshe Shokeid (1993: 435). See also Moshe Shokeid, "Ethnicity and the Cultural Code Among Arabs in a Mixed Town: Women's Modesty and Men's Honour at Stake," *Distant Relations: Ethnicity and Politics Among Arabs and North African Jews in Israel*, eds. Shlomo Deshen and Moshe Shokeid (New York: Praeger, 1982).

<sup>35</sup> Christian Palestinians have their own issues, not addressed by this article. Even Said tends to exclude discussion of Christian Arabs, favoring the more general plight of "Palestinians," which to many people indicates Muslims. See E. W. Said (1978), *Orientalism* 1st Ed. (NY: Pantheon); and (1994), *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1986-1994* (NY: Pantheon); also I. Abu-Lughod (Ed.) (1982), *Palestinian Rights: Affirmation and Denial* (Wilmette, Illinois: Medina).

<sup>36</sup> See especially I. Peleg (1994), *The Arab-Israeli Conflict and the Victory of Otherness*, *Critical Essays on Israeli Social Issues and Scholarship, Books on Israel*, Vol. III, R. A. Stone and W. P. Zenner (Eds.) (Albany: State University of New York), 227-243; D. K. Shipler (1986), *Arab and Jew: Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land* (London: Penguin); and E. Shohat (1989), *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin: University of Texas).



absorption—and more than 50 years of civil terrorism—ignorance of politics suggests schizophrenia. And such ignorance is dangerous. Complex negotiations of identity (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, race and identity) occur daily in Israel, sometimes while walking from one neighbourhood to another. I find this particularly true in traversing Jerusalem, the divided city. Telling a part of the bride's story, I also tell my own as a woman marginalised in her birth culture, one whose rhythms do not accord with those of men, and whose very presence may be seen as a disruption, the image of domestic dystopia born in the West.

#### 4. Never a Bride

The wedding's traditional purpose is public acknowledgement of ownership over fertility rights and lineal obligations. This bridal absence may originate in the effort to heighten the groom's anticipation, linked through sexual commission/consummation to a proper marriage, and thus the banishment of *shedd* (evil spirits) who might create trouble for the couple. *Hamdiye* says:

*And one hides the bride. If there are clay chests in her father's house, she goes behind one or goes into a corner. She hides herself from the people. It is a shameful thing, if she shows herself* (Granqvist p. 39).

The custom of guarding unmarried females from sexual contact the day before the wedding obtains in various cultural superstitions. Given the separation of women and men among Palestinian Arabs, the risk of the groom seeing the bride could be eliminated by steering him clear of the women's area. Yet this bride was also absent from the women's party—her own.

Or *was* it her party? The powerful women present were family to Ibrahim, not of her family. It might be said that Ibrahim threw one big party for his *hamula*, at which men and women claimed their own areas and celebrated among their own kind; bridal absence would thus be of minor importance. Stating that “among both Bedouin and rural Arabs in Israel, the members of the bride's family do not attend her wedding ceremony” (Holy 41), Joseph Ginat interprets this as symbolic of the bride remaining at home where she continues to belong to her family of origin. Galilean observations support a tradition of bridal absence.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, seeing a wedding in 1993, Gorkin writes, “The entire [wedding] ceremony, a mere postscript to the all-male party, was over in a matter of minutes” (p. 154). The ethnographer Joseph Ginat poses an additional possibility in the absence of the wedding itself, evoking Mahmud Darwish's political poem on the Palestinian wedding:

*This is the wedding without an end,  
In a border courtyard  
On an endless night.  
This is the Palestinian wedding:  
Never will lover reach lover  
Except as martyr or fugitive.* (Darwish)<sup>38</sup>

Towards what Ibrahim described as “the end of the night,” the men left the square and invaded the women's space, hauling out chairs from the roofed courtyard and placing them in the open before the *han*. (It was, on the contrary, the beginning of another party, the men's *binna*.) Some younger men wrestled a red velvet couch into the dirt centre of the circle, and women and older men were seated. Gorkin describes a similar phenomenon following the men's feast of poetry

<sup>37</sup> See also Ginat 1987. For further reading on Bedouin history, kinship structure, social customs and horse-breeding see Marx 1967; also Gideon M. Kressel (1992), *Descent Through Males: An Anthropological Investigation into the Patterns Underlying Social Hierarchy, Kinship, and Marriage among Former Bedouin in the Ramla-Lod area (Israel)*, Ed. G. M. Kressel (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz); and S. Merrill (1883), *East of the Jordan* (New York: C. Scribner's Son).

<sup>38</sup> All the italicised poetry from Mahmud Darwish comes from his poem “Blessed be That Which has not Come!” In Arabic and English, the poem may be found El Messiri, A. and Muhammad, A. W. (1982), *The Palestinian Wedding: A Bilingual Anthology of Contemporary Palestinian Resistance Poetry*, Trans. El Messiri, 1st Ed. (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents), 197-206.

when (as a man, forbidden the women's section) he saw "the women came out of hiding" (Gorkin 1993, p.154). Amid hastily stifled screams of tired children, the hired camera-man reset his video equipment (still following the men's party);<sup>39</sup> the music resumed and the men continued to dance. Then Ahmed's mother entered the circle.

## 5. Wedding Belle

She held aloft a circular mound of fuchsia flowers; the object was passed to Ahmed's unmarried brothers in order of succession, and eventually to Ahmed himself. Resembling a crown with its peaked circular shape, the floral centrepiece was mounted on a white plastic plate. An plastic "female" doll, eight inches tall, rode at its centre. Sitting among the bright pink flowers, this painted, meticulously-groomed and sumptuously-dressed doll provided an ironic surrogate for the absent bride: it was fair-skinned, blonde-haired and light-eyed in defiance of the dark Middle Eastern features and colouring which typified most of the women present, as well as the (absent) Palestinian bride. Of all the women at the party, the fair, blue-eyed Israeli woman most resembled the doll; thus, the European fetish provoked a grotesquely colonial appearance. Later an informant told me, "For us (Palestinians), blonde hair and blue eyes is more beautiful—because we are dark. It is the *difference*."<sup>40</sup>

In the video footage of this *haflab*, the Palestinian camera-man concentrates his lens upon the doll until the moment that the groom is hennaed. The placid little face dominates the video, lying back in her flowerbed atop the velvet, looming over dancers' heads as she is passed from hand to hand, or looking down upon her new in-laws, her face and the groom's transported together. In the wedding dance, the groom partners this small, opulently dressed "bride." Dressed in a Cinderella ball gown, the white colonial doll performs as a simulacrum of traditional Palestinian femaleness in which women conform to the Prophet's *hadith*, their domestic role the adornment of men.

Although my informants spoke of "decoration" and "custom," no one could verify the purpose of the doll. It may have symbolic roots in a Palestinian tradition described in 1935 as the "mock bride,"<sup>41</sup> but ritual affects are difficult to trace in a state with so large and transient a population. One cultural innovation may be use of a doll as a bridal fetish, signifying the bride who must not appear: a Palestinian proverb says of the bride that "She's so beautiful, it's as if she were a doll." In homage to this ideal of beauty, some Palestinians keep an opulently dressed female doll in the salon of the house; it is not intended as a fertility fetish (Baum 1999, p.180). I have seen female dolls sitting on porch chairs in Acco and Jerusalem, a motif associated with village life rather than urban custom. Thus far, I have found dolls as bridal fetishes documented only in the Galilean interior, north of the large Arabic village of Nazaret and west of the Kinneret.

In a scene from the Palestinian feature film *Urs bil Galil (Wedding in Galilee)*, directed by Palestinian Michel Khleifi, a doll is given singular power. The title's wedding illustrates the clash between Israelis and Palestinians, on the occasion of the *mukhtar* (village leader's) son's marriage

<sup>39</sup> Another Galilean wedding resulted in nine hours of videotape showing only men (Gorkin 1993: 155).

<sup>40</sup> Private conversation with Hourri, a Muslim woman of Nazareth (Haifa 1997).

<sup>41</sup> If so, then earlier accounts show substantial alterations: Hilma Granqvist writes that "it appears that a dressed-up pitchfork in a wedding procession is a kind of mock bride, for the purpose of warding off the mysterious dangers which are supposed to threaten a bride;" she calls this ritual a "kind of effigy of the bride— also called the *zarufe*," noting its mention in "several accounts of weddings in Palestine" (Granqvist 1935, p. 84). There are also records of transvestism among bridegrooms dressed in their brides' own garments (Westermarck 1914, p. 25, Granqvist 1935, p. 81). Bailey remarks the appearance of another bridal surrogate, "a vague figurine comprising a white head-dress draped over sticks fastened as a cross" called an *umriyih*, a reference to life (*umr*) "perhaps because it saves lives"; see C. Bailey (1974), *Bedouin Weddings in Sinai and the Negev. Studies in Wedding Customs*, 4, Ed. I. Ben-Ami (Jerusalem: Folklore Research Centre Studies) p. 122. The cross is not used religiously but simulates a human figure.

to a village woman, when the village is under curfew and all Arabs must be inside from sunset to sunrise. Lasting from several days to several weeks, weddings cannot be attended or even held during a village-wide curfew. The *mukhtar* makes a special, humiliating trip to ask the Israeli military governor for a dispensation to cover his son's wedding period, and the governor's staff cleverly suggests permitting the wedding while they infiltrate the *baflab* as invited "guests." As Darwish intones,

*Their blood is before me,*

*I see it not.*

*As if it were my country*

*Before me, yet I see it not...* (Mahmud Darwish)

Later, sated with *arak* (a liquor made of anise) and foods they compare to other Arabic conquests, the Occupational soldiers joke companionably at the feast table until a straw basket is brought in and passed from hand to hand. All watch tensely as the basket passes to the table of an openly hostile Arab man. Eyes fixed upon the Israeli commander, he abruptly overturns the basket, not discharging a bomb as expected but a fair plastic doll, her limbs torn from their sockets. Knowing that the soldiers are watching him, the man smirkingly kisses the plastic mouth, and the banquet's official festivities resume.

Weddings are large public celebrations where poetry and songs are recited to acknowledge topical events, including Israeli legislation and Palestinian conditions; El Messiri has noted that "after the Occupation of 1948 weddings became a principal means to express national sentiments [and a] theme to explore resistance" (p. 19). In Kleifi's movie the doll transparently symbolises not only the bride but all Palestinians who find themselves torn between resistance and tolerance (two Palestinian factions vie in the film), effeminised and ruptured by the Occupation (the groom is impotent), and mutilated by Israeli armament (the *mukhtar* nearly loses his horse—not coincidentally the bride's processional mount—as well as his child, in a nearby field riddled with mines). The doll delivers a message of ongoing tradition and resistance that the villagers, forced to host their enemies, cannot verbally express. Meant to appear Western, the doll compresses the conflicting metaphors of colonial power, plaything, female victim, war cripple and bombshell.

But if the doll at the *baflab* I attended represents the absent bride, superstitiously attracting and deflecting bad spirits, then why was the doll plastic, fair, and gowned in European dress? Esther Muchawsky-Schnapper has written that young Arab girls make "wedding" dolls to actualise their play and fantasies of adult life as mothers" (1994, p.94), but these dolls resemble their makers in skin tone and costuming. Caucasian dolls might signify the (groom's) family's unconscious desire for a bride who *looks* like the "oppositional" West—or, conversely, a metaphorical transfer of *shedd* to Israelis, but may invoke a much older superstition previously directed by practices such as drinking of milk to make the bridegroom's life "white"—synonymous in some Arab cultures with luck or brightness (Westermarck 1914, p.89) —rather than foreign complexion. Historically, gifts of silver, eggs and needles have similar power.

Fetishistic displays of "mock" brides or bridegrooms are not the only documented instances of decoys in Muslim weddings. Sometimes attendants dress to resemble the bride and groom (perhaps translated in Christian custom to the practice of dressing bridesmaids and groomsmen in matching garments); a boy may be placed behind the bride on her horse or camel, his arms wrapped around her waist (physically connecting the two for more literal-minded spirits). Diverse strategies once protected maidens from the *jinn* or *jnun* (evil spirit) virulence during the bridal week (when virgins are most vulnerable): married women encouraged males to throw stones at the bride as she processed from her father's village, to excite the bridegroom's desire to protect and keep her in her new home—although a second explanation is that this "causes her to take her evil with her instead of leaving it behind" (p.170).

The potential harmfulness of the daughter, particularly at this moment of transition from house to house, family to family, is intriguing, but it is not found only in Arab cultures. The Greeks, the Romans, and modern-day Christians throughout the world express these fearful

sentiments. Brides to this day are carried over thresholds, an age-old prohibition against the magic of the bride and the house coming into conflict before the bride has adopted her new people's customs. Just as the bride's procession from father's to father-in-law's house, seated upon a camel, horse or donkey, (atavistically) signified capture and forcible removal on one of these animals, the doll may have originally represented a captive bride—taken during raids on enemy camps. Today, even when brides live near the groom they may be ceremoniously “carried” away.”<sup>42</sup> Invoking the rules of modesty, Bedouins used to insist that a bride be taken from her family amid struggles and lamentations (Marx 1967), and that she run away after the wedding night in order to be “re-captured.” Similarly, a Palestinian bride cries when the men of the *zanna* (wedding procession) approach, and her family looks sad in order to signify her worth to her own people (Granqvist 1935, Gorkin and Othman 1996). Marriage by capture is clearly a strong trope. If the doll refers to the captive bride then “foreign” aspect and costume is logical. Capture of a beautiful bride would verify the strength of the conquering tribe and its reproductive potential, and such a fetish would bring good luck. These conjectures may help to explain the presence of the doll at Ahmed's *haflab*, contextualised in the absence of the bride. Or they may appear additional disruptions in the narrative, the introduction of an outside element (like the ethnographer herself), symbolically abstruse, a problem to overcome.

## 6. The Wedding Document

Delivered from home to home, the video of the wedding was circulated among the Arab villagers and then to me as honoured guest. The cassette transmits the faces and bodies of the small non-Arab contingent as inimically part of the celebration and family. Although ten years had passed since my last visit, women instantly recognised my face. The young man being married had then been one of the children at table, sent to sleep in the next room so as not to disturb the adult conversation. By desire, mutual goodwill and chance I had become a friend of the family. But in the video, these relationships are personally embodied, and what seems imaginable in the moment—the allowable transgressions of a known individual—acquires new meanings when embedded in an artistic form. Videotape, a medium mediating multiple re-viewings or revisions, translates my lived presence at the *haflab* into a series of overlapping representations—of the West, dangerous women, the continuing possibility of feminist intervention and disruption of the familiar domestic. Thus, the circulated document serves to subvert “tradition” and “authenticity” in this community, continuously and more significantly than my ontological presence. The act of documentation transfixes a part of the moment. For Palestinian viewers, the exotic other dancing in a circle of Arab family is one they know, as timelessly captured as the little doll. But as anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod writes:

Even ritual, that communal practice for which time seems to have such a different (perhaps cyclical) meaning and which in anthropological discourse so perfectly marks the (exotic, primitive) cultural other as different, turns out to be particular and anything but timeless (Abu-Lughod 1993, p.15).

Interruption becomes disruption, visible and archival.

The separation of men and women at this Palestinian *haflab* permitted differentiation of space, gender and life rhythms. The arrival of three non-Arab guests, physically and linguistically representing the imposition of Israeli occupational forces and operation of imperial rule, further complicated gender categorisations, and introduced another value for woman as well as man. My location at this event as participant-observer, momentarily inside yet always outside the domestic roles commonly ascribed to women in the society, changed the conception of those roles. My presence would be difficult to read neutrally, particularly given the breadth of my participation, my transgressions and their documentation. That interaction does not minimise

the respect I brought and continue to bring to Ibrahim's family, but inflects the community, creating (the possibility of) questions about the confines of the domestic sphere and its vulnerability to rupture.

For all its glorious language, the (translated) invitation I received to attend a *haflah* faltered over a single word—and with this inadvertent note dismissed the Palestinian bride. However unintentional the error it is also instructive, presaging the bride's later absence from her own celebration as well as the way she may be sequestered throughout her village life. As a Proverb says, "A woman is like a rug. If you don't keep shaking it, it will become full of fleas." Having interviewed women across Palestine, Syria, Lebanon and Algeria, Bouthaina Shaaban concluded:

*The more successful the woman is in her profession, the greater is the pressure exerted on her at home to prove that she is still a woman with connotations of 'weak, docile and feminine'...women who, for the most part, had rich experiences and valuable thoughts, were fettered by their own fears of seeming odd or ridiculous or of jeopardising their chances of a happy family life if they didn't behave according to inherited social traditions* (Shaaban 1988, p.27).

The minor misspelling (*kalab*, or simple, for *calab*, or bride) is also a metaphor for the treatment of women in general. The works and lives of women are largely unseen, like arrangements for a good party.

*The dream is ever truer.*

*There is no difference between the dream*

*And the body hidden inside the shrapnel,*

*And the dream is always more real.* (Mahmud Darwish)

Too familiar to be noticed, too unimportant to be missed, traditional Arab women often remain closeted in ancient dynastic family structures, invisible as cooks, servers, listeners, or child-carers. Dancing under the house (the place allotted to our dancing) symbolically elided the bodies of women with the house, its foundations, its sub-terrain, and its hidden spaces, locating the domestic beneath or beyond the view of men. The blatant, resplendent doll carried aloft at the *haflah* denies the fact of the true Palestinian bride, hidden behind walls of modesty, metaphor and custom; it shows a female sign effective enough to replace its referent, a manipulated European fetish dependent only upon Palestinian supporters. This is something less questionable, perhaps "simpler," than being a woman. My otherness is securely theorised in Western dichotomies, where to be other is yet to be same. Arab women do not enjoy this paradox of privilege. I can only offer these images because I do not see them enough; given time, the familiar becomes invisible, like a bride one never sees.

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