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Marriage talk
Palestinian women, intimacy, and the liberal nation-state

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A B S T R A C T ■ In feminist anthropological studies of Palestinian women gender change is often interpreted as contributing to the national struggle. Based on research of Palestinian Israeli university women's marriage talk, I look at how gender change articulated through liberal discourses can reproduce state national hegemony. Palestinian educated women are forbearers of gender change in that they re-create women's role in courtship and marriage from one of object to subject. Yet the subject position they take up is of the modern bourgeois individual – the required subject of the nation-state. Their marriage talk reproduces the hegemony of the nation-state by advocating and attaching the women to one of its central mechanisms of sovereignty – intimacy. Further, they espouse this intimacy within the genealogical limits that serve as the basis for definitions of the state's national character. Thus, even while calling for gender change, they 'talk' themselves into oppressive nationally defined power relations of the liberal state.

K E Y   W O R D S ■ Palestinians, Israel, marriage, liberalism, intimacy, postcolonialism, genealogy, nation-state, university

'Every week I get a call saying, "Come home. There's a [potential] groom."' This refrain, or some variation on it, is one of the most frequently repeated exasperations with 'home' expressed by Palestinian Israeli women at the

university. Mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts, cousins, and sometimes even neighbors are constantly trying to marry the women off. The women students experience this as unnecessary pressure on top of their worries about exams, papers, work, and future studies, yet continue to constantly discuss with excitement the weddings of sisters and friends, guys and boyfriends, and their future lives as married women. By listening to them we can hear them contesting the organization of gender relations at home. This article reconsiders the meaning of such liberal claims for gender change in the context of the postcolonial nation-state.

I heard this marriage talk during the two years of my doctoral fieldwork – participant observation with Palestinian Israeli women at the Hebrew University – and on casual follow-up over the years since. One full year of fieldwork was spent living in the dormitories with a group of women. I shared an apartment with three women and was in contact with countless others through daily life at the university in the dorms, classes, leisure and political activities. All daily contact was in Arabic. The rest of the fieldwork entailed interviews (most in Hebrew) and observation of classes and activities only. The initial research was carried out in 1999–2000, before the outbreak of the second Intifada. The ethnographic material is based on daily journal entries. As a single woman of similar age but of Jewish American stock, I was brought into marriage talk both as a peer of similar status (female and single of marriageable age) and often as foreigner whose lucky accident of birth had freed her of certain cultural gender obligations expected of the women.[1]

Marriage in a Jewish and democratic state

Israel is a postcolonial state in that it was founded out of an historical struggle for independence with a colonial power, Great Britain. It is unique, however, in that the state founded also represented internal colonization of an indigenous Palestinian population (Kimmerling, 1983; Zureik, 1979). Thus inherent to its founding and continued existence is a dual claim to being a democratic and Jewish state, what Oren Yiftachel describes as an 'ethnocracy' (Yiftachel, 1999). This positions its Palestinian citizens in a constant situation of civil inclusion yet national exclusion (Shafir and Peled, 2002). The state at once grants all citizens certain rights, while simultaneously allocating land and economic resources as well as job opportunities according to criteria based on Zionist priorities, Jewishness, or fulfillment of army service (from which Palestinians are 'exempt').

Conservation and reverence of the institution of marriage and women's role as mothers play an important role in preservation of the ethnocractic character of the state. As a Jewish state, Israel views marriage as an

institution that supports and promotes (Jewish) fertility essential to over-coming the perceived demographic threat that high Arab fertility rates will create a Jewish/Arab population imbalance in the coming decades. As a democratic, modern nation-state, however, Israel is interested in encourag-ing a western sensibility of controlled fertility and enlightened, working motherhood (Berkovitz, 1999; Fogiel-Bijaoui, 1999; Melamed, 2005). Berkowitz shows how these connections between motherhood and national interests have translated into a separate citizenship track for Jewish women in which national obligation is fulfilled through marriage and motherhood.

Palestinian women in Israel are also affected by the state's desire to preserve its Jewish and democratic character. On the one hand, their fertil-ity and motherhood is viewed as a demographic threat. On the other hand, proof of the state's democratic modernism is contingent upon respect of civil and minority rights. In this situation of constant national opposition alongside civil participation, Palestinian women are often trapped in what Hasan (1999) calls the 'patriarchal politics' between Palestinian and state patriarchy. On the part of the Palestinian community, the gendered order is preserved as a means of safeguarding the 'authenticity' of Palestinians as a national group differentiated from the Jewish society in which it partici-pates. At the same time, the state caters to this preservation out of a pseudo-cultural respect that is a means to preserve the borders of the Jewish collective. Whether it be in the separation of personal status courts (which deal with registering marriages and divorces), non-interventionist policies concerning honor killings, historical government cooperation with hamula leadership, or even policies of geographic separation that preserve Arab enclaves (Cohen, 1965; Hasan, 1999; Yiftachel, 1992), Palestinian Israeli women find their lives organized around patriarchal conceptions of gender relations.

But at the university Palestinian women find themselves in a liminal situ-ation – especially when they live away from home, like these women at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. According to Arab cultural conceptions prevalent in Palestinian Israeli society the women fit the bill of neither 'girls' nor 'women'. The cultural assumption is that womanhood comes as a result of marriage and motherhood, which insure that adult sexual awak-ening will also be properly channeled into social conceptions of gender order (Ali, 1999; Hasan, 1991; Saar, 2000, 2004a). By living away from home, they have overstepped the bounds of community surveillance meant to protect girls. Yet, as they are not yet married, they cannot be considered women.

The pressure to marry that the women's families exert (suggesting poten-tial grooms) reflects a desire to fit women students into safe categories, guaranteeing that upon graduation the women will return home both

physically and culturally. Marriage in Arab culture is traditionally a family concern with fathers holding the ultimate authority over their daughters' matches. It is a means for maintaining and regulating community control over individuals, particularly women (Eickelman, 1981; Kandiyoti, 1991; Keddie, 1991). It is an arena for competition over status and resources but within socially accepted symbols of status, wealth, and honor (Tapper, 1991). The institution of marriage is the paramount means for insuring an individual's acquiescence to accepted adult gender roles, it is a sign of family success (Manaa and Haj-Yehia, 1995), and weddings are a public affirmation of community and its organizing principles.

Yet during their university studies, Palestinian women are brought into another community, in which the prominence of the marriage institute is suspended. Though they learn side-by-side with Jews and from mostly Jewish professors, socially they become immersed into the community of their Palestinian Israeli peers. The women of this community share their liminal status vis-à-vis Arab culture; they make the university peer community into a space for expressing new ideas and questioning accepted norms of life cycle and social roles. Whether they give in to family pressure at any point or not, their families' uneasiness becomes a catalyst for talking about the shape of ideal womanhood (Erdreich, 2004, 2006a; Zoaby, 2000). The ways these women talk together about marriage reflects the dilemmas they face in considering adulthood, the gender expectations they come up against and their ideals for change.

Marriage talk

Haim Hazan reminds us that 'what people say' is 'the creative expression of human culture. It is comprised of the values, symbols, ideas and beliefs that people hold and can be seen as a sort of text formulated by them' (1992: 23). That this text is not set but is written through social interaction belies its origins in an ongoing negotiation of mutual understanding, legitimate behavior, and social relations (Quinn and Holland, 1987). In other words, talk is the arena in which people deal with cultural norms and ideals and work on and around them. For girls and college-age women in particular, talk is one of the ways in which they discuss ways of fitting into and working around gender norms and ideals; for them talk becomes an arena for narrating their future selves (Fine and Macpherson, 1994; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; Holland and Skinner, 1987; Thompson, 1989).

In the Palestinian women's exasperations with pressures from home we can hear the women creating a text that deals with the demands of traditional values and national-collective obligation, while in their discussions about weddings and boyfriends we can hear them testing the

waters of the liberal romantic ideal. This marriage talk, which takes up a large part of university free time, should be viewed not just as a frequent occurrence, but rather as a social text in which we can read the beliefs and ideas these women author for understanding and ordering their adult lives.

As a social arena in which ideals of social position and identity are expressed, the women's marriage talk is the focus of this article; the ultimate decisions and actions they make concerning marriage and weddings serve as a backdrop that is intertwined into the spoken text. Perhaps reflecting the pressure to answer to collective obligation, many of these women *do* participate in classically 'traditional' customs concerning weddings and marriage. They often meet their fiancés through matchmakers or go-betweens; they behave according to the sexual restrictions posed on them between engagement and marriage. The men they marry will have financed and built a house, and they as brides will contribute the furnishings. They partake in the traditional cycle of wedding celebrations.[2] What concerns me is how the women reflect on the processes they take part in, how they bring liberal romantic ideals into dialogue with the values and ideals of collective obligation. I am interested in identifying the cultural *ideals* of this society of educated women, which find expression in the whole repertoire of wedding frenzy discourse and the dialogue between romantic liberalism and preservation of the collective. These ideals about who the women want to be and how they want to fit into the social fabric and relate to others are the keys to grasping up-and-coming cultural conceptions of adult subjectivity.

The study of Palestinian women and marriage in Israel

Marriage is not a new topic in the study of Palestinian culture, yet it has usually been examined from a functional and not a phenomenological standpoint. Reflecting standard orientalist trends in western anthropology of its time, the early anthropological literature on Palestinian women and marriage objectified women and viewed them as victims of Arab culture.[3] Marriage was analyzed on the macro-level most often as an economic matter, within which women were objects of exchange, the roots of this objectification being located in Arab traditions of kinship organization and consolidation of power, wealth, and honor. Such studies discussed how men used women to solidify family ties, to safeguard inheritance, to insure continuity of bloodlines, and to fulfill personal desires (Cohen, 1965; Ginat, 1987; Granqvist, 1931, 1935; Kressel, 1976; Rosenfeld, 1960). In these studies marriage was one screw in the machine of political order and questions of honor and their analysis focused primarily on the doings of men (with the exception of Granqvist). Women's resistance was often

explained functionally on the macro-level as evidence of how the system makes room for transgressions (Marx, 1967).

Feminist literature since the 1990s has criticized this view and focused on women's active roles within or in spite of Islamic and Arab tradition as well as emphasized the need to examine Arab women's daily doings. In order to avoid reifying culture as the sole explanatory factor of Palestinian women's positioning in the family, feminist studies have analyzed how women are affected by modernization, globalization, and nationalism, and how they actively partake in setting their position in society. Thus, for example, Moors (1995) looks for explanations of women's status beyond the Islamic legal conjunctions about women, marriage, and property in the ways women maneuver property (such as dowry). Taking into account the shift in the character of property from a productive resource to a consumer product, which came about as a result of colonization, globalization, and displacement, she illustrates how these greater processes affected gender and family structure. Kanaaneh (2002) looks at women's strategies for recruiting their reproductive capacity in marriage to the national struggle. Saar writes about the alternative paths to adulthood created by single women, which circumvent culturally accepted paths to womanhood (through marriage and childbearing) while preserving the national collectivity (2000). She sees their practice of concealing modern liberal lifestyle choices so as not to threaten the collective as the potential source of change in collective subordination (2004a). In these studies gender change is considered evidence of a changed position of the national collective, be it in the global or local arena.

With these feminist anthropologists I share the perspective that Palestinian women can be active subjects of their own positioning and can be involved in determining the character and positioning of their collectivity in today's globalized society. I would, however, like to question one of their underlying implicit assumptions – that the 'modern' gender changes brought about for and *by* women are necessarily also contributions by women to the national project or at least good for women and thus good for the position of the national-collective vis-à-vis the dominant collective. I want to consider not only the agency of the women to recreate social conceptions, but also the limits that the macro-state context puts on their micro-level negotiations.

Ideals of the self, ideals of the group: bourgeois womanhood and national genealogy

In what follows, I bring ethnographic examples of women students' marriage talk and practice. I do not purport to represent here all the subjects

of or ways marriage is discussed. Indeed there are variations, disagreements, even different communities of women with divergent ideas about marriage. My aim is to portray one trend among all these types of talk and to analyze the implications of it for the women, the Palestinian Israeli community, and the state. Through analysis of their talk and practice I will show how we can hear these women espousing and participating in the discourses of intimacy and of genealogy, discourses which paradoxically ensnare them within state interests while allowing them to pursue gender interests. While we will hear how the women use liberalism as a tool to pry apart genealogical frames of patriarchy, we will also hear how these genealogical frames and their political connotations in this situation of internal colonization can demarcate the bounds of the women's liberal consciousness.

By intimacy and genealogy I am referring respectively to the idea of heterosexual love as the basis for partnership and the idea of bloodline as the basis for group identity. Historically these two intertwined discourses have been the basis for the organization of a liberal nation-state in which the distribution of goods and rights is regulated through the institutions of the nuclear family and ethnic or national social groups.

Bourgeois womanhood: the way I would(n't) have wanted it

The year after Najwa, Basma, Intisar, Samah, and Maisa finished their BA, Najwa and Maisa stayed on at the university while their three friends returned home.[4] They all worked and continued studying either for a Masters degree, a teaching certificate, or in a professional course. Though they were not always together, when they did meet and over the phone they kept up an ongoing conversation about their future marriages and adult lives. They traveled back and forth to the university to visit, finish seminar papers, and study and to their home villages in the all Muslim *Muthalath* region in central Israel[5] to attend parts of each other's wedding festivities. The two spaces – home and the university – are part of a highly differentiated geographic arrangement in Israel in which Arab enclaves (home) and Jewish towns and urban cities preserve an ethno-national division characterized, among other aspects, by disparate versions of patriarchy (Erdreich and Rapoport, 2006). The women remained friends, discussing marriage with each other across these spaces and often discussing each other in terms of marriage. They used each others' courtships, weddings, and early married/engaged lives as texts against which to formulate and articulate conceptions about ideal womanhood.

Najwa is a stylish woman, who studied geography and education and worked throughout her studies at a downtown Jerusalem branch of one of Israel's largest banks. She is extremely talkative, often domineering conversations with both male and female friends and with me. Within these

conversations the declarations she makes about herself and her friends relate to and partake in an ongoing conversation about marriage.

Najwa reported that when Basma and Intisar got engaged, Samah, who herself had gotten engaged while at university, said to Najwa, 'Okay, now it's your turn.' Najwa accepted this, but was concerned with how she would choose a husband. She repeatedly voiced her opposition to the idea of waiting until the engagement period to get to know her fiancé. It was important to her to marry someone who 'thinks like I do' and not like one man who had courted her, who, she related, 'thought that women should be in the house and only if there is time left then they should work'. She outlined the problem of finding someone appropriate to her way of thinking in this way:

> With the Christian [Arabs] it's different. You just decide that you want to be engaged and tell your family and then you can start going out together and everything, but with us [Muslims] you have to read *Fatha* [the opening verse of the Koran], so it is like you are married.[6] I'm not willing to do that. I want to get to know him well first. How long did Basma know her fiancé [before agreeing to the engagement]? A month? How can you know someone in that time? Guys like to act nice, but you can't know if they are playing with you. Plus maybe he's a nice guy but that doesn't mean he's appropriate for you. So if you get to know him during the engagement, how can you break it off when everyone sees that he's a nice guy?

Using a stereotypical distinction between Christian and Muslim, Najwa voices her desire to be associated with modern ideas. Though this distinction has been shown repeatedly to lack a basis in fact, it is part of a local discourse that poses Christian as western/modern and Muslim as authentic/primitive (Erdreich, 2004; Kanaaneh, 2002; Saar, 2004a). Two ideas are central to Najwa's ideals about adulthood: that heterosexual marriage is a given and that it should be based on a chosen, personally 'appropriate' companionship.

Though she does not explicitly talk about love, she does conceptualize courtship as a means by which to find the most suitable partner for oneself as an individual. These ideas of appropriateness and personal suitability, as well as the self-executed search for them, conform to the ideas of romantic love that developed in the 20th century as part of the trends towards the secularization of life and an ethic of popular consumerist culture. In contrast to both Victorian ideas of love as well as to Arab conceptions of marriage that Najwa feels pressured by, the 20th-century conception equates love with personal happiness and affirmation of self (Illouz, 1997). This conception of love-based-on-choice affirms the modern idea of the individual; that is, that each person is special with unique capabilities and characteristics. Requited choice is an affirmation of this uniqueness;

marriage is confirmation of the right to express and realize this uniqueness (Giddens, 1992; Illouz and Wilf, 2005). Najwa advocates an ideal of courtship that affirms her right to fulfill herself, which takes from the collective the power to determine her future position as a woman.

Like woman in many cultures today, Najwa does not question how the 'heterosexual imaginary' institutionalizes marriage as means for organizing gender, class, and race relations (Ingraham, 1999). Foucault teaches us that the very idea of love-based marriages channels physical desire into an expression of individuality, a necessary prerequisite for a liberal capitalist society. Marriage based on a choice aimed at allowing for personal fulfillment celebrates a culture of individualism – a cornerstone of capitalism and the liberal state. Heterosexual love-based marriage is actually an arena of power for regulating or modifying sexual desire into a form conducive to capitalist society. That is, the nuclear family – a consumer unit headed by a laborer or two laborers, which earns enough and requires for its subsistence the purchase of market goods. Remembering Engels (1972[1884]), we should also recognize how heterosexual choice-based marriage consolidates the regulation of private property into a class-situated unit as opposed to one based on family or community ties. Najwa herself is confident partner choice will assure her ability to fulfill the liberal ideal of the working woman, itself based on assumptions of the independent, individual subject.[7]

Not surprisingly, part of 'appropriate' for Najwa concerns finding a spouse supportive of her desire to act out the liberal image of a working woman. She is also concerned with being able to find work opportunities *as a married woman*. Thus she wanted not only to marry a man who would support her desire to work, but also to be a married woman in a place in which she could find work. For Palestinian women in Israel, concerns about finding work acceptable to their communities and appropriate to their level of education are real. The geographical arrangement of the labor market into Arab and Jewish sectors as well as Arab sub-groups' cultural ideas of propriety of work and travel for women set limitations on their opportunities for labor force participation (Khattab, 2002). At the close of her post-BA year after having completed a teaching certificate she discussed this with Emile, a male student in his last year, and me.

In a casual conversation on a summer night under the parking lot lights outside the dormitories, she told us that because she had finished her degree and had amassed great work experience from the bank and from another job as a tutorial studies coordinator, she was ready to respond to her father's pressures and consider going home. At the same time she had doubts. While she hoped to get transferred to the bank in her village, she could not fathom making the transition from a main branch bank in the big city to 'an Arab bank'. She would never be able to deal with the pettiness and gossip of an

Arab bank, she said. Emile chimed in to remind her, 'And as a woman you will have no chance of getting promoted in an Arab bank.' Najwa was lucidly conscious of the gendered character of spaces in the state – of the liberal opportunities the city afforded her versus the limits that patriarchy posed when it is circumscribed into an enclave. Compounding her fears was her critical view of what had happened to Basma and Intisar who had returned to their villages to do their teaching certificates. Both had been insistent on continuing their educating and finding work. Basma in particular, even after her return, had continued criticizing both men's attempts to be set up with her only after seeing her from afar and women's constant inquiries and suggestions that she focus her energies on finding a husband. Yet within a year both women had been set up with men who became their fiancés.

> Najwa: Look at those girls that went back. What have they done? Nothing. They didn't find work and they are just getting married. I really benefited from staying here for a year. They were stupid to go back; it is hard to finish when you are in that home atmosphere. And now they are getting married! You know Arab women – dealing with chicken, cooking, etc. – they won't finish their degrees.

Bridging the issues of work and marriage, Najwa reiterates the view that choice-based marriage is preferable, that it is the only way to insure self-fulfillment, and that giving in to pressure of the collective in marriage impedes personal growth in other areas. Her two friends are in danger of succumbing to Arab society's conceptions of women ('chicken and cooking') as evidenced by what she sees as their forfeit on individuality in being set up with fiancés. To insure her individual freedom to move across spaces and pursue career desires, she avoids going back and being put under pressure of the collective. Contrasting her own ideals to Basma and Intisar's actual introductions to their husbands, she lauds individual self-fulfillment not only as a product of choice-based marriage but as a means for insuring her continued future as an employed and fulfilled *individual* woman subject. According to her ideals, freedom, psychological security, and control of the future are associated with partner choice just as they are in the ethos of romantic love (Giddens, 1992).

Two and a half months after the conversation with Emile, Najwa informed me she was getting engaged and would be living in Jerusalem. She presented to me her side of what Giddens calls a 'mutual narrative biography' in which the romantic capturing of the heart creates the basis of a future based on heterosexual partnership (1992: 46).

Najwa had always been straightforward about wanting an older man, once telling Reem (a second year student) that she wanted someone at least five years older, 'financially stable', and 'serious'. Describing her courtship

to me, she related that she had become friendly with Alaa, her fiancé, through a friend. The three would go out together for meals and coffee and to Ramallah. Over several months she had started talking with him more often and telling him over coffee at the university how much she was worried about the transition home. He invited her out alone several times, and they began discussing how they saw their futures. Neither of them was explicit that they were discussing a future together, but it was clear. Basically, they had both been interested, but each had kept it to her/himself. On her birthday, he brought her flowers and then asked what she thought about them getting engaged. She was in shock and could not say anything for a few minutes. She had not expected it to happen so quickly, she told me, but this is how she would have wanted it. 'Do you remember when we talked about this?' she reminded me. 'It's not like with Basma and Intisar. I've known him for a while.'

Again using Basma and Intisar's examples as a text of giving into traditional collectivism, Najwa adds another dimension to her ideal of partner choice. First of all, it is a means for securing expression of individuality; the narrative of romance is how she personally imagined and desired to find a partner. Second, her chosen partner, who is financially stable and serious, has affirmed her uniqueness by choosing her, thus providing her with 'ontological security' (Giddens, 1992: 175). Furthermore, her choice not only insures liberal self-fulfillment, but it is also part of a culture of consumption – going to restaurants, living away from extended family, working and getting ahead. Though Najwa avoids referring to her courtship with Alaa as dating, it mirrors the middle-class or bourgeois consumptive patterns characteristic of dating in which self-fulfillment is attained by mutual seeking out of personal pleasure and expression (Illouz, 1997). According to Illouz, dating is a modern form of courtship that serves to sever the individual from community and family bonds by 'presuppos[ing] a temporary withdrawal from group and family membership' (p. 56) and encourages the formation of a private self. Yet this self is created not only through the bond with a partner but also through the public consumption of goods, an act that displays class status and position. For Najwa, her courtship is not only characterized by consumption, but is also a strategy to insure its continuation. The freedom of the anonymity of the city allows Najwa to play out these acts of liberal consumption and self-definition and to overcome what she feels is an oppressive patriarchy. Choosing not only a partner, but also one who is willing to stay on in Jerusalem and who is himself financially stable, allows her to continue working *and* consuming in the manner to which she has become accustomed. In other words, her ideal of partner choice positions her as a consuming subject both during her courtship and in her future roles as a married women.

I should emphasize that despite Najwa's disdain, Basma and Intisar themselves were advocates of similar ideals. They both were concerned with doing teaching certificates so they would be able to find work once married and not be stuck at home. Intisar, a religious woman, was quicker than Basma to marry, have children, and stay at home according to her husband's wishes. Basma ended up marrying a man who had admired her from afar and had had his sister approach her for him. Once engaged, they began going out to restaurants and public arenas of consumption. Basma has continued studying, working, and going out after her marriage and the birth of her son.

The stories of all of these women confirm trends of the increased participation of Palestinian Israeli women in middle-class or bourgeois consumerism (Forte, 2002; Saar, 2004b) as well as the link between the ability to act on ideals of partner choice and women's position as working consumers (Saar, 2004a). Though Basma's and Intisar's lives seem to have capitulated to collectivist ideals, they both *talked* about their lives as struggles to make their own choices and have the freedom to express their capabilities in working and studying. What is important to notice is that regardless of the ability to act on these ideals, the women's talk reflects their desire to uphold them. In other words, their narratives of self are shaped around telling the story of an individual and her struggle against and as part of the Palestinian collective. The common theme of their marriage talk is that of the expression or proof of the modern individual woman.

Arab bourgeois womanhood: wedding re-dress

The women's marriage talk continues at actual wedding festivities. Like Najwa's comparison of her own courtship to those of Basma and Intisar, the women, including the bride, engage with actual marriages in a critical discussion of how they would and would *not* want things for themselves. Behaving as a proactive participant in the marriage market and selecting specific goods, trappings, and ceremonies for one's wedding, a woman partakes in the capitalist consumptive patterns which are a language for communicating social and class location (Baudrillard, 1981; Douglass and Isherwood, 1978; Haug, 1986). In the choices they make about their wedding and engagement ceremonies as in the statements about their dream ceremonies, the women again espouse the ideal of the individual bourgeoisie consumer, pursuing her desires through consumption practices.

This is nothing new for anthropologists, who have already written about the dream wedding as a representation of the bourgeois, as a means for creating new traditions, as westernization, and as channeling of female desire into consumption (Edwards, 1989; Goldstein-Gidoni, 1997; Ingraham, 1999; Kendall, 1994). Yet in the context of Palestinian women

talking about weddings and in light of the importance of marriage in preserving the Palestinian collective in Israel, the attachment to this historical discourse begs special consideration. When the signs or wedding trappings consumed by Palestinian women contrast with those the Palestinian Israeli community is used to consuming, we can hear the women expressing a desire for gendered social relocation.

At Basma's engagement party (*khutbi*), her university girlfriends including Samah and Intisar were all in attendance. Reem and I arrived at the simple, undecorated pavilion, which was close to both her and Basma's homes. A few men were sitting in the open air main hall where the dance floor and bridal stage had been set up; the women relatives were sitting on plastic chairs in a side room and an adjoining cement courtyard. The groom's family would arrive later. We found Basma in another small side-room, which looked as if it doubled as an office; on one side was a writing desk and chair and on the other a low table surrounded by four chairs. Basma was surrounded by her university girlfriends; no non-relatives from her hometown had been invited.

She had gone to great pains not to be too made-up nor to wear one of the frilly, sequined dresses with stiff bodices and puffy crinolines that are standard wedding and engagement fare. Instead she had chosen a light blue dress with spaghetti straps, decorated sparingly with rhinestones and glitter and a slight flare at the hem; a matching diaphanous shawl graced her shoulders. Her hair was pulled back into a hairpiece attachment and a blond highlight streaked her chestnut hair on one front side. A layer of foundation covered blemishes on her face, but the rest of her make-up was subdued – a single line of ice blue along her eyelids to match her dress.

That the only non-relative guests Basma invited were her university girlfriends did not go unnoticed, nor did the elegant style of her clothes and make-up. Reem commented on both and pointed out to me how in contrast both were to the usual fare in their village. While the bride's female relatives usually buy chiffon or glittery party dresses, Basma's sister Yousra (and Reem's roommate) was outfitted in a skirt and sweater set put together by Reem herself from Castro, a popular Israeli clothing store. Samah commented on the number of guests invited to the party. Recently engaged and soon to be the center of her own wedding party, she kept a running commentary on the party and drew comparisons with her own wedding plans. She observed that Basma must be 'embarrassed' at the moment, since she is a shy person at heart. She elaborated with an explanation based on discussions with Basma before the wedding. Basma, like herself, had not wanted to make a big party for her engagement, but had been pressured into it. Samah then insisted adamantly that when it came time for the actual wedding she did not want to make a big party.

Keeping in mind that at least into the early 1990s weddings and

engagements made up the biggest and most developed branch of the Palestinian Israeli economic sector and that the majority of leisure time and activities among Palestinian Israelis was spent at weddings and engagements (Manaa and Haj-Yehia, 1995), we can examine forms of wedding celebration consumption as a prevalent means of social expression. The engagement guest list and the bridal party costumes make statements about taste and the relationship between bodies and collectives.

The invited guests represent the women's desires about social belonging. Selecting and restricting the guests, these women try to mark a boundary around the audience of affirmation of their womanhood. In Arab tradition, the wedding ceremony is a required step for recognition of the woman's status as married and thus an adult; legal contract does not suffice. The importance this tradition grants to the community elevates community over the individual and reconfirms community control over women. In the past, weddings were a means of reconfirming or re-establishing ties with neighbors and the village as a whole (Granqvist, 1935). The whole village was invited and expected to contribute and thus to forge obligations of repayment. Today, the invitation list has changed from an expression of village solidarity to an expression of economic and class relations; invitees are selected according to existing and potential desirable ties. Small wedding celebrations, held in halls as opposed to family courtyards, are usually the choice of an educated middle class (Manaa and Haj-Yehia, 1995). By desiring a small wedding, Basma and Samah hope to shrink symbolically the magnitude of community control over their adult womanhood. By inviting her university friends rather than fellow villagers as the only non-related guests, Basma expresses a desire to create, as much as possible, an audience made up of women whom she can assume think along the same lines as herself. In other words, she hopes to attach herself to an educated class rather than to a village collective.

Basma's and Yousra's bodies also mark the sensibilities of the class to which they hope to belong as adult women. They choose elegance and grace over flamboyance and ostentation. Yousra's clothes are even purchased from the heart of the Israeli bourgeoisie, Castro. These displays of consumption mark them as consumers of a specifically classed taste. Taste is an historically created definition that draws relationships between individual bodies and society. Thus their attachments to taste should be read in terms of the links they draw or sever between the women and the traditional collective.

Through their consumption Basma and Yousra attach themselves to culturally defined definitions of 'appropriateness' or taste (Appadurai, 1986; Bourdieu, 1984) that are considered bourgeois or Israeli middle class. Foucault (1978) traces the historical development of the bourgeoisie class body in Europe, and shows that with the rise of capitalism, the new

bourgeois distinguished itself from the lower classes by its hygiene, from the aristocracy by its refined and simple elegance, and from natives of the colonies by their enlightenment and civility. These same ideas of race, hygiene, and elegance were adopted and adapted as part of the development of Israeli capitalism as well. The bourgeoisie or middle class in Israel was connected to a Zionist political strata comprised of European bourgeois immigrants who bonded around bourgeois culture in the early days of the state to distinguish themselves from lower class and eastern immigrant newcomers (Ben-Porat, 1999). This class was established through its markings of taste as well as by its Ashkenazi or western background. It distinguished itself as enlightened, civilized, and more hygienic than others within – both Jews from Arab lands and native Palestinians (Hirsch, 2002; Nuriely, 2005; Shenhav, forthcoming). Palestinians in Israel have adopted many of these ideas, neutrally as their taste of choice but also often with what seems to be an orientalist self-stigmatization of Arab primitiveness (Kanaaneh, 2002). Choosing simple, elegant styles over lavish make-up and glitter, Basma and Yousra attach their bodies to this bourgeois taste and fashion. In this way, they paradoxically attach themselves to state discourses predicated on a preference for western bourgeois sensibilities, a preference built around a view of Arab sensibilities as primitive and low class. But the women's expressions of taste do not entirely disregard their national collective. Bringing ideas they have crystallized while at university into reshaping their wedding performances, they ford the genealogical division by way of a bridge of class. They create a new bourgeois class, the basis of liberal capitalism and modernity, from within the collective.

The women also reinterpret traditions of the collective into an expression of bourgeois sensibility. We can see how they do this to the tradition of the wedding gold.

After waiting around for at least half an hour Basma's father and fiancé came in with the *qadi* (Islamic judge) to get Basma's signature of consent on the wedding contract. Basma was then called out to be greeted by the groom's female relatives; she paraded out with her girlfriends and began dancing among them. After the dancing, Basma was 'dressed' with gifts of gold jewelry. Basma and her fiancé stood on the wedding stage in a decorated booth with two fancy chairs; a woman from the bride or groom's side stood on each side of them. Each woman carried a purse full of jewelry. Basma's fiancé took several pieces from the woman on his side and fastened them on Basma. She did the same for him with a watch. Other people approached the booth and fastened their gifts of jewelry on Basma. All of it was heavy yellow gold bangles and necklaces traditionally bought as part of the bride's wedding gifts. Before her engagement Basma had repeatedly expressed distaste for this gold jewelry any time the issue had come up. She

preferred, in her words, 'simple' jewelry, 'even silver'. Her friend Maisa was the only one to give her a short necklace with a small drop. Samah and Reem complained that there had been no time to buy anything on such short notice in the midst of studying and work (with Samah repeating for the second time that day that she had been at work even that morning). Maisa commented that when she gets married she prefers not to do the whole gold ceremony at all.

Moors (2003) claims that women's gold jewelry is an embodiment of family relations and thus we can read changes in gold jewelry traditions as changes in family relations. I would add that in talk about gold jewelry we can listen to the negotiation of new meanings of gender relations. Within the context of the traditional stages of the engagement celebration, Samah, Reem, Maisa, and even Basma's previous intentions concerning the 'dressing' ceremony express a divergence from Arab tradition both in terms of taste and in terms of the intended relationship between the adult woman and the community. Preferring non-gold jewelry or not to receive jewelry at all, these woman are discarding the original intentions of the wedding gifts – to grant some semblance of financial security to the bride, who it was assumed, as an adult female caring for house and children, will have no other means to productive wealth. Instead they choose to relate to the gifts as a consumer product through which they can mark themselves as appropriately dressed for their newly chosen class – the educated bourgeois woman.

In her study of women in the Jabal Nablus region, Moors follows how the higher karat *baladi* gold is today considered a mark of tradition and is seen as unrefined.[8] While very valuable, this type of jewelry is meant as part of the economic security relinquished to women by their fathers as a dower or bride price paid by the groom's father. Only men were traditionally required to give gifts of gold to women; women were expected to give domestic and reproductive labor in return. Newer, less valuable types of gold have become class markers of the educated and middle class. Meant for adornment rather than investment, they are usually given by the groom to the bride. This underscores a modern view of marriage as a joining of a conjugal couple rather than a contract between families. Their lesser value and more refined style de-emphasize gold as a means of economic security for women and accentuate its meaning as a mark of consumption. Moors (1995) emphasizes that the giving of gifts by the groom to the bride is a marker of suitable femininity for women educated in western institutions, because it symbolizes their future economic contribution to the marriage as working women.

In exchanging jewelry gifts, Basma and her groom celebrate marriage as an intimate bond between a couple rather than between families. In this bond, the woman is not only a mother but an economic contributor whose

unique capabilities can be expressed. As witnesses to this ceremony, the other women confirm this bond and its essentiality to their class sensibilities. They express a desire for belonging to this idea in their talk about giving gifts to Basma. The origins of the exchange of jewelry lay not only in the giving of gold as part of the dower but also in the tradition of *tankit*. In this tradition the groom is given money gifts by the village men and the bride by the women, creating social and family links around the new couple (Cohen, 1965). Here the women's talk about giving gifts of their own expresses their desire to form social bonds of friendship even if they are not family or co-villagers.

Whether in actual wedding practices (choices of dress and make-up, invited guests) or the ones they hope for (a small party, no gold 'dressing' ceremony, or a ceremony but with jewelry answering to their own taste and not to the dictates of tradition), these women conduct a conversation between Arab conceptions of a woman's body and liberal western conceptions of the bourgeois female body. They do not choose one over the other; they adopt many trappings of the bourgeois body: simple elegance, the independent female body, and minimal community involvement. Theirs is an Arab conception of the bourgeois female body. Liberal bourgeois ideals are used to change genealogical gender arrangements and traditions of the genealogical group are used to change the western basis of the liberal. While this Arab bourgeois female body challenges patriarchal ideas of control and limitation of women's movement, it also serves as the basis of even an ethnocratic nation-state's claims to liberalism.

The women's talk about partner choice and the design of wedding celebrations are arenas for narrating ideals of bourgeois individualism, which are the basis of the modern nation-state. As mentioned, the intimate bond at the basis of romantic love and marriage is also an important component of narrating such an individualized self. Giddens (1992) adds that the intimate bond is also the basis of liberal democracy. At the foundation of intimate bonds of romantic love is the 'pure relationship' between individuals, a relationship based on equality and the erasure of social status (class, ethnic, national, religion, etc.). Ideally one is loved for who one is and not for one's status. Liberal democracy is also predicated on the assumption of free and equal relations between individuals, on an authority which recognizes individual sovereignty and affords each person the chance to develop potentialities, determine associations, and take advantage of economic opportunities. I now turn to the women's talk about intimate relationships, and to consider what they have to say about the purity of relationships – how they feel it is limited and what limits they pose for themselves.

National genealogy: because of religion

In a conversation with Najwa, Reem criticized one of Najwa's roommates for hanging out with a man other than her fiancé and attributed the problem to the fact that the woman is Christian and the man Druze. She explained that the religion issue prevented them from being together, and 'what happens with us Arabs is that when two people [from different religions] are in love and then break up, one of them has to get engaged a week or two later'. The implication was that one of them is married off to prevent the danger of them getting back together.

Two years later, one of her own friends (a Christian) was in a similar situation. Gathered around a *nargilah*[9] with Emile, Belal, and another man, they discussed pressing transition issues such as MA theses, salaries, harassment by the border police, and friends who were getting married and engaged. Reem's friend's predicament came up as an example of problems in transition home. This woman and a Muslim man had been seeing each other for over five years. They had met at the university, he dropped out, she finished, and he had just returned to his studies. The young man had twice asked the woman's father permission to marry her and twice his proposal had been refused on the grounds that he was not educated and had dropped out.

'Everyone knows it's because of religion', Reem elaborated: 'If it were really because of education her dad would have said, "Okay, wait and see how he does now."' Reem had been surprised at her friend's father's reaction: 'They are such a liberal family. You wouldn't expect it, and now she isn't supposed to go out. They took away her phone and everything.' Emile was shocked too, and said, using the Hebrew word, 'It is *mitaskel* [frustrating]. Two people love each other for over five years – it's frustrating, so frustrating.' Everyone present nodded in agreement.

Reem and her friends espouse the romantic ideal of intimacy – that it is the means for self-validation through mutual discovery (Giddens, 1992). They clearly value this intimate bond as fashioned over time (five years) and as a process that should not be 'frustrated'. They also assume it is part of liberalism and should be valued by people who assume other liberal ideas. At first glance, it seems that they blame religion for impeding intimacy and therefore liberalism. Religious boundaries prevent mixed religious couples from being together. But if we listen closely, we hear them blaming not religion per se, but Arab society. Be it a matter of intimate relations between a Druze and a Christian or a Christian and a Muslim, it is religion among 'us Arabs' that is an impediment to proper institutionalization of intimacy – marriage. Reem makes her critique of Arab society explicit by pitting it against 'liberalism', by which she is actually referring to the ideals of intimacy and the sovereign subject. Her friend's father spurns liberalism

when he reverts to social status and preservation of marriage as part of larger kinship bonds, failing to recognize: 1) that each individual is what he makes of himself (through education for instance); and 2) that the desire of two people should be the material of social bonds. By taking away his daughter's phone and forbidding her to go out, he limits not only his daughter's marriage but also her ability and freedom to form social relationships and fulfill her potential. Their 'frustration' is not with religion per se but with the limits patriarchal authority puts on individual sovereignty.

Yet while Reem talks about and favors intimacy, she and her friends do not see it as all-encompassing. First, they have no qualms accepting that the subjects of intimacy should be classed, in this case, educated bodies. A valid limit on intimacy is a person's education. The *ideal* model of a liberal adult, whether man or woman, is involved in intimate relations and is of an educated class. Second, there is no discussion at all about intimacy with Jews. This silence should be taken into account, because it reveals that their complaints about Arab society actually replicate a powerful discourse at the basis of Israeli ethnocracy – both the continued and 'natural' separation of nations as well as an image of Arab society as traditional, not modern, and less enlightened.

The separateness of Arab and Jewish collectives is part of a genealogical discourse tied up with that intimacy, and which is also at play in creating ideals of individuality. Where Giddens sees intimacy as a basis for democracy, Povinelli (2003) points out that it is also the basis for a form of social bondage of the individual to the state. Furthermore, the discourse of intimacy creates the ideal of the individual, sovereign subject, but is not able to explain away the differential ability of subjects from different groups (gender, ethnic, national, class, religious, etc.) to fulfill the ideal of individual sovereignty. Ideas about genealogy, like the conceptions about Jewishness and Arabness at the base of Israeli ethnocracy, become tied up with the discourse of intimacy in order to explain away why members of certain groups have less success realizing individual sovereignty though they are citizens of a liberal nation-state.

Let's take a moment to understand how the connection between intimacy and genealogy helps organize the nation-state by creating sovereign individuals and recruiting the marriage bonds between them to the formation of bloodline groups. The climax of the romantic ideal based on intimacy comes with the affirmation made in marriage, an institution around which the state then regulates belonging, property, inheritance, and welfare. In this way the discourse of intimacy 'connects the micro-practices of certain forms of love to the macro-practices of state forms of government and capital forms of production, circulation, and consumption' (Povinelli, 2003: 7). The discourse of intimacy also replaced the concept of alliance as an organizing principle of society with the concept of the sovereign subject.

Bloodlines were now drawn and traced not by linkages made according to group interests in solidification of social, economic, and religious ties, but through intimate relations of individuals. This new conception of genealogy and social groups – not families and dynasties, but ethnic and national collectivities – became a vocabulary for making sense of and adjusting for the constraints of the past while preserving the ideals of liberalism (Povinelli, 2002; Stoler, 1995). Whether it be colonizers wanting to preserve their privileged position over the colonized and to erect modern liberal states (Said, 1978; Stoler, 1995) or a postcolonial nation-state such as Israel wanting to explain why the indigenous Arab population has lower rates of higher educational attainment than Jews, both use genealogy as a means for dealing with the failure or discrepancies in the fulfillment of individual freedom and sovereignty. The difference between individuals is attributed to a group history in order for the liberal ideal of the individual to remain intact.

Reem and her friends' concept of liberalism incorporates acceptance of the genealogical definition that places Arabs of different religions together as a group. Their liberal desire is to make pre-ordained status irrelevant to the marriage bond; yet, they endorse religious exogamy[10] with the ethno-national group but not ethno-national exogamy. When Reem and her friends blame Arab society for limiting intimacy and thus individual sovereignty, they reproduce the distinction between Jewish and Arab bloodlines (which is extremely hard to break and also not often crossed by Jews), which serves as a basis for the allocation of goods and resources in Israeli society. More importantly, however, they reproduce the hierarchy between the two according to which Jewish society has characteristics of the 'liberal' west and Arab society is patriarchal. This hierarchy between genealogical groups is one of the ways the state explains away group difference in individual achievement, attainment, and advancement.

Genealogies and intimacy: the way my society is

Reem, Najwa, and their friends, who were noticeably silent about relations with Jews, were not the only ones to talk about the issue of inter-religious marriage. Silence on the matter of intimacy with Jews is infrequently interrupted by the occasional woman like Reem's acquaintance Nawal, relating stories of the flattering attentions of Jewish men and subsequently dismissing the possibility of reciprocation. Exceptions like Nawal can help us understand how intimacy and genealogy remain intertwined and forceful in guiding the women's ideals about womanhood.

One marriage conversation took place outside the dorms, where Nawal and Zaynab, both first year students from the Galilee region in northern Israel (populated by Muslims, Christians, and Druze),[11] were sitting close

together on a bench whispering and giggling. I greeted them and sat down on the grass. They brought me into their conversation about guys and crushes. Nawal lamented that she is no good at dealing with guys who 'start up' with her. She really wanted to be 'in connection' with someone, but had had no offers.

Then she reconsidered and said, 'You know what? There are offers, but from Jews. They don't realize I'm Arab.' She started to get excited and tell stories accompanied by dramatic hand and body movements. 'There was this security guard who hit on me once, but I didn't know how to react.' She continued, 'And there was Shai, this guy I studied with. We had become really close. You know someone you can really talk to. He didn't realize I was Arab, and I guess I sort of kept it from him. I mean I wanted him to know, but I also really wanted there to be something between us.' Then she turned to Zaynab: 'You remember when I was Shai this and Shai that?' Without waiting for a response, she continued, 'Then once he came up behind me and heard me talking to Zaynab, and that was it. After he realized I was Arab, he sort of pulled away. I was ready to fight for it – my parents, everything ...'

This led into a discussion about religion and how both women 'need Muslim guys'. Otherwise, they were sure their parents would disown them, which they felt was 'not worth it'. Zaynab sang out a song in English, 'I just want you ...', sighed and cried out, 'Is it too much to ask that some guy will just come and sing to me?' The conversation developed into a discussion of the merits and downsides of Christian and Druze men, ending with Nawal mulling over marriages between Arab men and 'foreign' women.[12] After contemplating whether and how these marriages work, she declared, 'I think that usually in that case one of them ends up having to give up all his [*sic*] nationality.'

Whether or not Nawal was really willing to fight for this relationship, her story reflects her consideration of the actuality of totally pure romantic love and intimate relationships. In the telling, she considers the meaning of freeing herself from society as realized through the establishment of intimacy between two mutually chosen partners regardless or in spite of their social status. She deduces that the romantic ideal advocates a separation from family. For her this separation is not merely the formation of an independent economic unit around which the state regulates lives of its citizens (Giddens, 1992), but could also be a form of national estrangement. It is the context of the state and the separation of the two genealogical groups which could frame intimacy with a Jew as treason to her own group. Because not 'giving up on nationality' is also important to her, she comes to the conclusion that intimacy is not all-encompassing, it cannot totally erase social status, and it is not only a matter of her own self-fulfillment. Drawing a clear connection between marriage of individuals and

preservation of the national collective, she and Zaynab continue to advocate the romantic ideal but only as long as the creation of intimate bonds preserves bloodlines. They accept one of the basic tenets of patriarchal politics that bridges between intimacy and genealogy – that marriage is a declaration of collective loyalty.

A few weeks later Nawal continued her running commentary when I ran into her on campus sitting with another friend, Raneen. Nawal had just come from the center of town (a predominantly Jewish area) where she had bought a present for her nephew. She unwrapped it to show it to us and related the story of her purchase this way:

> The male sales clerk had asked how old she was. 'Guess', she answered.
> Sales clerk: Twentysomething.
> Nawal: Twenty exactly.
> Sales clerk: You've already been released from the army?
> Nawal: I didn't do the army.
> Sales clerk: Wow, you were smart. I wasted three years of my life.
> Nawal: (As she walked out) By the way, I was exempted.
> 'It didn't even cross his mind to think I was Arab!' she told us.

Upon reaching age 18 all Jews are required to serve in the army; Palestinians are exempt. By bringing together young adults from all over the country, the army often serves as a huge match-making institution for Jewish Israelis. It is also a marker of age and life-stage (pre-army, post-army). The sales clerk uses inquiry into Nawal's army service as a means for gauging whether she is of the right age and mindset for dating or for establishing some sort of intimate relations.

In this way, the army and the occupation it represents become part of the negotiation of the intimate. The borders of occupation do so as well. After another story about a DJ flirting with her, Nawal joked she was going to Nablus to find a groom. In this pre-second Intifada marriage across borders was a real possibility, but also infrequent. Palestinian Israelis often consider Palestinians from the West Bank as lower class and less modern. Their own notions reflect the lines drawn by the state – lines that split Palestinian genealogy into Israeli Palestinian and other Palestinian.

Nawal joked about Nablus out of frustration with what she perceived should be her pool of potential suitors. In her words, because 'There are no grooms at the university.'

I asked her, 'What do you mean there are no grooms here? Guys are always flirting with you and you know how to flirt.'

'Yeah but *Jewish* guys!' she said and explained her philosophy on men. She would not have a relationship with a guy unless there was the possibility it would lead to marriage, and for that reason she would never be with a Jew. If she was with an Arab and it did not work out there would

at least have been the possibility of marriage. 'Listen', she said, 'I would love to live with a Jew for the next 10 years – or a Christian, or an Arab [Muslim], but that's not the way my society is.'

Nawal is fascinated with Jewish men and their free expressions of desire. Unlike the Muslim man who will sweep her off her feet yet exists only in her dreams, Jewish men who hint at the possibility of intimacy really exist. She can even name the object of her desires (as with Shai). Nawal is exposed to the public expressions of romantic love even if private intimacy is not yet her lot. She flirts, sings pop songs, and talks about love with her girl-friends. She uses the commercialized culture of romance to label her own emotions and to identify scenarios in which they can be communicated (Illouz, 1997). Yet in Israel this commercialized culture and its publicness belongs to the Jewish sector. Traditional elements within Arab society make its outward expression in the Arab sector less prominent and even danger-ous for some women (Saar, 2005). So the liberal intimacy Nawal knows and sees around her is part of Jewishness and she continues to see it as such. It is an ideal attached to a collective considered liberal and open but which happens to also have a certain genealogical character.

Nawal enjoys and talks about the attentions of Jewish men for the possibility of intimacy they suggest; talking about them is her way of expressing the desire for a class-affiliated ideal – intimacy with a man. But because this class-affiliated ideal is tied up with genealogy, she must also consider the implications of her attachment to it. Like Reem and her friends, Nawal sees being part of the Arab collective as responsible for constraints on her intimacy; 'my parents' and 'my society' do not allow her total freedom with her sexuality. She blames the collective defined by bloodlines for its history and culture that prohibit her self-expression. At the same time and despite her criticism of the history of the group, she accepts her belong-ing in it as an ideal. She dismisses the possibility of a relationship with a Jewish man, because intimacy with a Jew would be an expression of a break of social bonds with family and with the national collective. She also dismisses any intimate relations not directly connected to the formation of a family as un-Arab. Unlike Reem and her friends who try to create a class-affiliated ideal within the borders of the genealogical group, Nawal idealizes intimacy yet limits her own pursuit of it to remain true to an 'authentic' ideal of the collective.

In their marriage talk, Nawal and Reem interweave the discourses of intimacy and of genealogy. Though Nawal contemplates intimate relations with Jews while Reem contemplates intimate relations among Arabs of different religions, both advocate a genealogically placed liberalism. In these women's marriage talk, genealogy and intimacy continue to direct how they see their womanhood as Palestinians in the state of Israel. Talking out their future desires in the private space of intimate relationships and marriage,

they attach themselves to the foundations of the modern (and postcolonial) nation-state – bourgeois sovereign individual subjects and genealogically separate groups. Illouz and Wilf (2005) claim that intimacy of romantic love can actually challenge the familialism and patriarchal hegemony of the Israeli state because it emphasizes the individual over the family. While Jewish women may be able to use the individualist basis of intimacy to overcome the demands of the national ethos of motherhood, Palestinian women's claims to the individualism of intimacy do not necessarily serve to change collective subordination. When marriage talk voices claims for gender changes that challenge Arab patriarchy, the continued association of intimacy and liberalism with the Jewish sector reproduces the image of Palestinian society as less modern and liberal. When intimacy is steered towards preservation of the national collective and its unique characteristics, then women's marriage talk strengthens the idea that national authenticity is predicated on patriarchal limits on women's sexuality. Both types of claims play into the way the state guises ethnocracy in a cloak of liberalism.

Marriage talk and reproduction of postcolonial liberalism

Though Palestinian women's marriage talk can be understood as the expression of a historically and socially created ideal of the subject, we need to understand how it is part of the process of postcolonial liberalism and works to shape Israeli social hierarchies. The ideals expressed in the women's talk about partner choice, the dream wedding, and intimate relations reproduce the essential prerequisites of modern liberal society – the subject as individual and the existence of a consumer bourgeois class. Certainly, the women's marriage talk and practice voice a demand for gender change, for a more subjective position and control over their adult lives, but these demands also reproduce discourses that legitimate a status quo in which the national collective is disenfranchised.

By desiring to become bourgeois adults but within the national collective, the women's marriage talk demands gender change, while it legitimizes the national status quo. By attaching themselves to the western philosophy of liberalism as a source of gender change against and in spite of their belonging to the naturalized Other group, the women's talk falls into the trap of legitimizing western morality and social organization. Their marriage talk, by espousing both the idea of the sovereign subject and of separate nations, perhaps unavoidably, contributes to the very ideas the state needs to promote in order to insure its legitimacy and continuity. Thus they discipline themselves towards an Israeli version of postcolonial capitalist liberalism, which promises both gender and national equality, but comes up short on each account.

Postcolonial liberalism aims to prolong the existence of a discourse central to the idea of the modern nation-state, necessary to its existence, and only possible within all its relations of power (Povinelli, 2002). The Israeli version attempts to legitimate the continuation of a type of social organization that is predicated on its differential positioning of subjects by race, ethnicity, gender, and class (Berkovitz, 1999; Hever et al., 2002; Yiftachel, 1999). Returning to the idea about the link between micro-practices of love and macro-practices of the state, we can understand the women's marriage talk as a micro-practice linked to the many other macro-practices for proliferation of state power.

In Israel the genealogical basis of state liberalism is especially strong because of the state's Zionist foundations. Laws concerning citizenship, marriage, military service, and even access to state resources differentiate between Jews and Arabs. Even when these are ensconced in liberal language of compensatory benefits, such as the differential benefits for veterans, new immigrants, or people living in 'areas of national priority', they determine that Palestinians always get less of the national capital.[13] Palestinian women are always positioned by genealogical discourse as second class citizens to Jews, and are expected to preserve this boundary. But it is not the state dictating the women's talk; it is them talking independently and perhaps as a community. By buying into both a discourse of intimacy *and* preserving the bloodlines of Zionist ideology, these women unintentionally partake in re-creating the genealogy that determines them as semi-sovereign subjects, limited by their nationality. It seems then that the women reiterate genealogical regulations of intimacy at the basis of the Israeli nation-state and channel desire into a properly ethnicized liberal adulthood. The point is not to blame them for being the authors of their own subjugation, but to see how enticing and clever postcolonial liberalism can be.

From a feminist perspective, we should recognize that these women are increasingly becoming subjects of their own positioning in society. Yet I believe we should not hurry to be politically correct and acclaim demands for gender change as a 'women's' contribution to fighting national oppression. This would be a mere reproduction of the western assumption that liberal gender ideals are the litmus test of modernity and progress. There is great value in revealing how women are involved in national construction and survival. By researching women and bringing to light their involvement in politics, demographics, and economics, previous studies of Palestinian women have certainly widened the picture we have of the processes of social change and national survival and women's role in the two. Yet it would be an injustice not to highlight how the national or genealogical foundations of liberal ideals consistently limit their application by the very groups they claim to liberate.

I am not trying to claim that these women and their marriage talk are traitors to the nation, nor am I promoting a view of the authenticity of tradition and thus the need for women to avoid 'modernization' in service of the nation. Rather, I have tried to portray one way in which gender change (especially that which takes on the trappings of what is considered 'liberal') can have unintended implications. In this case paradoxically, the implication can be to legitimize another power regime which categorizes and oppresses these women as the Other.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1 For further reflective discussion of my status as researcher, see Erdreich (2006b) and Erdreich and Rapoport (2002).
2 From participant observation, the marriage cycle is celebrated in the following ceremonies, some of which are often combined: reading *fatha* (the opening verse of the Koran), the *helwi* (when the groom's family comes to bless the bride the night before the engagement party), *khutbi* (the engagement party around the signing of the marriage contract), *sahara* (the women's party before the bride goes to her new home), and the *aurs* or wedding.
3 For a theoretical analysis of this trend in the past and present, see Mohanty (1988).
4 All names are fictitious.
5 I refer only to the populations of Palestinian Israelis in this area; these towns are interspersed with Jewish towns and populations as well.
6 Reading *fatha* and the signing of the wedding contract are usually done at the engagement ceremony. This gives the woman legal status of being married. She still does not enjoy communal recognition as a married woman until the marriage ceremony, only after which can she also live with her husband. However, should the engagement be called off, the couple is divorced and she is considered a 'divorcee'.

7 I realize these assumptions have been extensively critiqued by feminist scholars. My concern here, however, is not to judge whether they are valid or not. Rather, I am concerned with the assumptions and ideals, erroneous or otherwise, that the women use in their marriage talk.

8 The women Moors studied are not citizens of Israel. Basma and her friends resided in villages on the Israeli side of the green line contiguous to the Jabal Nablus region. They and their families usually purchased bridal jewelry from Nablus itself.

9 Water-pipe.

10 Marriage outside of the group.

11 Again, in the Palestinian Israeli villages. Jews also populate the Galilee; many Jewish towns are the fruit of government policies aimed at 'Judaizing' the Galilee to insure state territorial control against the threat of attempted succession by the large Arab population of the area (Yiftachel, 1992).

12 She was referring to the infrequent but well-known marriages between Palestinian Israeli men from the Galilee and women they met while studying in mostly formerly communist, eastern European countries.

13 Though the state does differentiate between religious groups of Arabs in terms of marriage, military service requirements, and sometimes educational frameworks, it also blurs these differences in far greater areas such as land allocations, government funding, immigration rights, and legal injunctions.

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