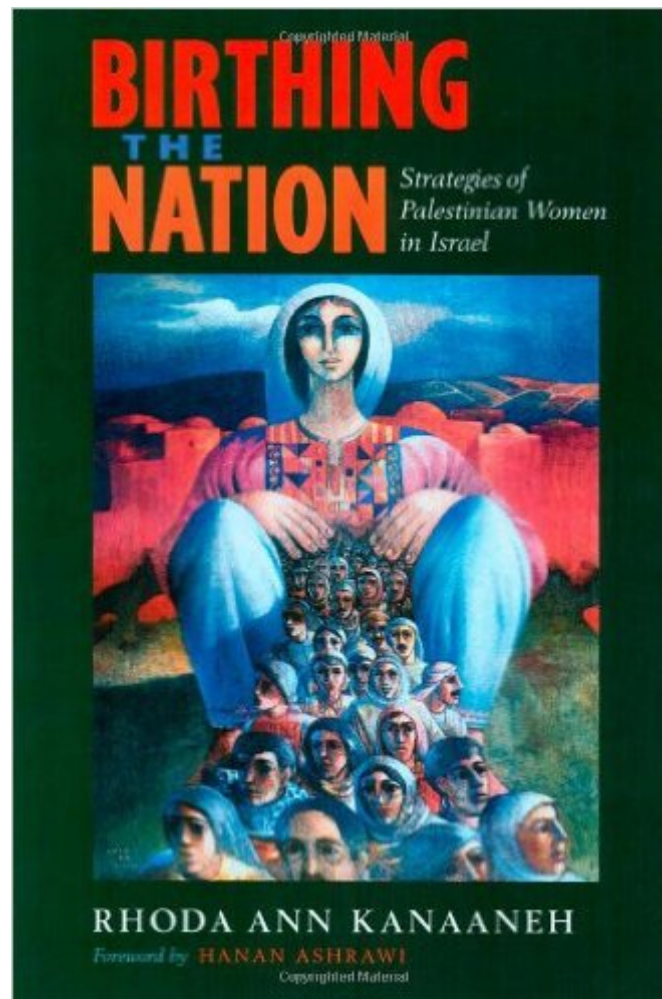


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Birthing The Nation: Strategies Of Palestinian Women In Israel (California Series In Public Anthropology)



Synopsis

In this rich, evocative study, Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh examines the changing notions of sexuality, family, and reproduction among Palestinians living in Israel. Distinguishing itself amid the media maelstrom that has homogenized Palestinians as "terrorists," this important new work offers a complex, nuanced, and humanized depiction of a group rendered invisible despite its substantial size, now accounting for nearly twenty percent of Israel's population. Groundbreaking and thought-provoking, *Birthing the Nation* contextualizes the politics of reproduction within contemporary issues affecting Palestinians, and places these issues against the backdrop of a dominant Israeli society.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Birthing the Nation is a remarkable work of anthropology as well as an important political document. It is one of those books that, by taking a narrow topic and exploring it thoroughly, offers stunning insights on everything from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict to the nature of modernity itself. It also is a fun read, filled with hilarious anecdotes and fascinating details. (It is, after all, about sex.) The author is both an American and Israeli citizen who grew up in a Palestinian village in Israel. She speaks fluent Arabic, Hebrew, and English and did her advanced schooling in the U.S. This special background makes her uniquely qualified to explore such a topic. Because she was raised in a Palestinian village, people from that area were willing to talk to her freely about their private lives.

Because she is American-educated and has lived in the United States (and is married to a Jewish American), she knows how to describe Arab culture to Western readers. She knows what we will be interested in, and knows what needs explaining. Kanaaneh devotes a decent amount of time to Israeli government policies regarding reproduction and Israeli political rhetoric on these issues. But the heart of her book is her fieldwork -- hundreds of hours of interviews with Palestinians about having children and having sex, and how the people themselves take stock of such things. The book's main contention is that in Palestinian communities in Israel, reproductive decisions are used as a way of measuring modernity. For example, for many Palestinians, a family's decision to have few children is seen as an indication of how advanced they are. For others, having many children is seen as an indication of how dedicated they are to their national cause.

In order to effectively study history, it is necessary to observe and study the progress of change over time. Rhoda Ann Kanaaneh's book *Birthing the Nation* is an anthropological work tracing the evolution of female culture among Palestinians living in Israel. Kanaaneh traces the development of reproduction, sexuality and social characteristics among Palestinian women, and how these conditions have changed over time. She also alludes to political factors, mainly Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, as a major cause of this evolution. The book is extremely enlightening and cogent in its reflection of the condition and lifestyle of Palestinian women; however, it is flawed in that it is inherently biased against the Israeli government. This partiality is manifested through her narrow choice of prejudiced sources and her reference to Israeli-Arabs as "Palestinians-" a label that is not only inaccurate but also deliberately offensive to Israelis. Another unwarranted aspect of the author's work is the use of visibly anti-Israeli sources. A prime example of this is that the book is foreworded by Hanan Ashrawi, a PLO politician that has been linked with terrorist activity in the past. Ashrawi is by no means a neutral source, and evidence of it is her accusation that "[Israelis] rob us of our most basic feelings for our children" (xiii). Taken at face value, this unfounded statement is a testament of her hatred for Israel. Ashrawi has made a long career of attempting to villainize Israel, and this severely hurts her credibility. Further one-sided sources include the likes of Edward Said, long a vehement objector of Israel's existence, and the Palestine Red Crescent Society- an additional condemner of Israel.

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