Introduction

Placing

Jamili gets pregnant. She is going to have a fourth child because “four is the perfect sized family.” Her husband hopes for a new construction contract that will allow him to squeeze all of the child’s “needs” into the budget. Jamili’s friend and neighbor Latifi describes her as still “a bit primitive”: “She still thinks the role of women is primarily as breeders.” Jamili’s nurse is upset with her because Jamili is over 35, and she warns her: “You better do all the tests I send you to, or else.” Her mother hopes it’s a boy who will “raise our heads high.” This pregnancy puts Jamili well above the average birth rate for Jews in Israel and pushes her closer to the higher average birth rate of Arabs. “Another Arab baby for the [Jewish] state to contend with,” she says defiantly.

In looking at family-planning processes among Palestinians in the Galilee (il-Jalil in local dialect), it is important to recognize “that reproduction, in its biological and social senses, is inextricably bound up with the production of culture” (Ginsburg and Rapp 1995: 2). The negotiation of reproductive decisions in the Galilee has recently become a struggle not only over women’s bodies and lives but also over significant social concepts such as “the feminine,” “the masculine,” “the household,” “our culture,” “the nation,” and “progress.” Family planning is now part of the social processes in which these concepts are daily defined, changed, and redefined in people’s lives; in which gender is configured, communities are imagined, and boundaries of the modern are drawn.
The five chapters of this book correspond roughly to five interrelated fields of meaning and power in which reproduction is caught up and constructed: nation, economy, difference, body, and gender. Jamili’s pregnancy acquires various significances as it circulates in these realms of life. Jamili’s remark that “we want to increase the Arabs” must be understood within the realm of the nation. Her concern that “if I thought we could provide more children with all the necessities of modern life, then I wouldn’t hesitate to have more” must be understood within a new conceptualization of household economy. Her mother’s preference for a male child who will make her proud must be understood as constructing a particular cosmology of gender. Her neighbor’s mocking “What does she think in her simple mind, that if she has another son he’s going to somehow make Palestine victorious [yunṣur falāṣṭin]?” must be understood in light of the measures of difference that Palestinians are coming to use to evaluate each other. Her determination that “after I deliver I’m going on this new diet so I don’t become like those fat women whose husbands neglect them” must be understood within a new discourse of the body (as well as economy, difference, and gender). These interwoven spheres of reproduction tell a new and interesting story of how babies, power, and culture are being made in this corner of the world.

INTRODUCTION TO (MY) PLACE

There are many ways to name the Galilee, its people, space, and place (see map). Growing up there, I identified at different moments with my nuclear family, parts of my extended family, my school district, my village, the triangle of three villages to which we belong, the neighboring village in which I went to high school, the Battuf valley area, the Acre district, the Nazareth region, the Tiberias vicinity, the Galilee, northern Israel, Palestine, “the people of 48,” hapa-haoles (half whites) in Hawaii, internal diaspora, the homeland, the East, the West, the “developing” world, my father’s religion, my mother’s religion, people of the book, my essence, my hybridity . . . I belonged to each of these categories, but not equally and not all at once; or, as Ann Laura Stoler puts it, “in different measure and not all at the same time” (1991: 87). It is in the measure and time that different parts of my identity become salient in my own mind and in the minds of those around me that a fragmentary yet in some ways cohesive history of power can be traced. These various subjectivities emerge situationally, and one can trace the condi-
Galilee
tions and systematicities that allow them to do so. Power circulates, but not endlessly: it congeals at significant moments.

The many family members, friends, and acquaintances (and enemies?) whom I evoke in this study as the people of the Galilee similarly have concentric, overlapping, and disparate zones of belonging that map out a terrain of power—personal as well as economic, familial, and political histories. I make this assertion to acknowledge the sometimes overwhelming complexity of family planning in the Galilee, and the consistencies that I hope to elucidate. In some nexuses of power, hybridity and complexity are not “an infinite interplay of possibilities and flavors of the month” but rather are experienced as reified essence (Lavie and Swedenburg 1996: 3).

The Galilee is indeed a very composite place. My close friend Nadia, who visits from Germany every summer—the daughter of Othman Saadi, a friend and former neighbor of my father’s from ‘Arrabi, and Angelica Saadi, a German woman and close friend of many members of my family—Nadia too is part of my Galilee. Othman Saadi is a descendant of religious scholars who came many decades ago from Morocco. Just as my aunt Najiyi, who has never left the Galilee and rarely leaves the village because she is subject to motion sickness, is also part of my Galilee. Yet this aunt’s mother, known to me as mart ‘ammi ‘Ali, was not originally from ‘Arrabi at all—she grew up in the city of Haifa and as a young woman moved to ‘Arrabi, where she married my father’s uncle. My memories of her, too, are part of my Galilee. The women born in ‘Arrabi who married their first cousins next door as well as the many “foreign” brides—women who came from all parts of the world, from the former Czechoslovakia to Sweden to Morocco, from Italy to South Dakota—all are part of my Galilee.

My “Aunt” Miriam, a German Jewish holocaust survivor, and her adopted Yemenite children, whom we visited almost every Sunday of my childhood in the Jewish beach town of Nahariyya, were also part of my Galilee. Fathers Jacob and Thomas, who founded a monastery near my village to emulate the lifestyle of the early Christians in these mountains, were also part of my Galilee. So were the settlers behind the barbed wire on the hilltop overlooking my house who run a yoga meditation center, and who collided not only with my fellow villagers but also with Fathers Jacob and Thomas’s monastery, whose land they border. And so was Eli “Yasin,” an Israeli Jew who bought an old stone house (from the Yasin family—hence his nickname) on the outskirts of my village, and who allegedly reports to Israeli intelligence on activi-
ties in the village through the grapevine of young men whom he supplies with hashish. Nadia, Aunt Najiyyi, and Eli Yasin are all part of the Galilee—but not in the same way. Each relates to the Galilee and experiences it and affects it in his or her own ways. But to describe a place as composite is certainly not to celebrate fragmentation.

Multiplicity and complexity contain institutional frameworks. We were all part of the Galilee, Eli Yasin, mart’ammi’Ali, and I, but we had differential access to systems of power—economic, political, familial, gendered.

My mother was one of those foreign brides, yet her hybrid Chinese-Hawaiian-American background was most often referred to simply as American. Her Chineseness was overwhelmed by her Americanness in the context of American economic and political dominance in Israel. My own multi-ethnic background was perceived largely as Arab, since my father’s identity was considered more determinative of my identity than my mother’s. While I was considered Arab, I was also considered special when I could skip classes in English as a second language at school or when I wore the T-shirts with big Hawaiian prints my grandmother sent me. My mother was never required to convert from Christianity to Islam, partly because my father is an atheist, partly because of the open-mindedness and open-heartedness of my relatives, but also because we children were assumed to belong to our father’s faith (even though he called himself an atheist, socially he was still considered Muslim). Yet in my home we celebrated Christmas, and my relatives came to wish us happy holidays. We celebrated the Muslim Eids with our extended family, and my mother participated fully. I rarely experienced disjuncture between the two religions. Yet the ease with which people accepted my mother and the apparent seamlessness of my identity owed much to the assumptions of a father’s dominance and American global privilege.

The assumption of my father’s and my Muslimness in the Galilee should not suggest that Islam is all-powerful there. In my predominantly Muslim third grade in public school, I memorized verses of the Qur’an and listened to the beautiful stories our religion teacher told about the spider and dove that saved the Prophet’s life, while the few Christian students were assigned to a Christian teacher.1 But in my private Baptist

1. Palestinians in the Galilee are approximately 68% Muslim, 16% Christian, 16% Druze. The percentages among the total Palestinian population inside Israel differ slightly: 76% Muslim, 15% Christian, 9% Druze. “Christian” includes Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Maronite, Protestant, Anglican, Baptist, and Copt communities.
high school, we—Muslims, Christians, and Druze—sang “The Gospel in One Word Is Joy” with Bob the minister from Tennessee. There is hybridity here, but there are also systematic configurations of power. That most private schools for Palestinians are (missionary) Christian is one aspect of this power. That all Palestinian students—even in the private Christian schools—are required to study Jewish religious texts as part of a mandatory unit in Hebrew is another.

That I experienced multiplicity does not necessarily mean that there were no patterns in it. My joy in the seventh grade at seeing the film al-Qadisiyya about Muslim conquests of Persia, was tempered by the remark of my cousin Salwa (who went to a Quaker school in the West Bank) that the Muslims forced people to convert to Islam with their swords. I realized and she realized (in a seventh-grade way) that we had received different versions of history. Many of us in the Galilee are aware that there are many senses of “us,” even when we are sometimes able to ignore them.

This hybridity in a context of power is demonstrated in this brief history of my village written by my uncle in his doctoral dissertation:

Like most Middle Eastern towns, . . . ['Arrabi] is built on the ruins of several previous settlements. Occupation of the site, however, has not been interrupted for the last two thousand years. Several wars brought destruction, but it was always immediately rebuilt.

. . . The first historical source . . . to mention a town in the location . . . is the book Milhamot Ha-Hashmoneam (i.e., the Hasmonean Wars), connecting it with Jonathan, a leader of a Jewish army rebelling against the Seleucids. During the rule of Herod it became the third largest town in the whole Galilee and was surrounded with a wall. In the year 67 AD it was destroyed by the Roman forces under the ruling governor and all its population were killed.

During the Byzantine rule, the town was inhabited by Christians and recently (1969) the ruins of a church from that period were uncovered near the present existing church. It is believed that the town was an important administrative seat during this period.

Since the coming of the Arabs to the area, it has been mainly an Arab Moslem town. It existed during the Crusaders’ period and is mentioned in maps from that period under its present name.

During the Mamluk period ['Arrabi] again assumed importance and became the seat of a large district.

The period in the history of ['Arrabi] of which its people are most conscious and most proud is that of Zahir al-Umar, the Bedouin who dominated the political life of Northern Palestine for nearly 40 years, from 1737–1775. Zahir al-Umar was a member of the Zeydani Bedouin tribe that lived for a while close to ['Arrabi], raiding the neighboring Druze village of Salama in
revenge against a Druze chief who married a Moslem girl from 'Arrabi by force.

In 1710, Zahir al-Umar was authorized by the Ottoman authorities to collect the taxes from 'Arrabi and the neighboring villages. Soon he turned the area into his own feudal domain, recruited an army from these villages and conquered additional areas. The building he constructed, from which he ruled, is still standing in ['Arrabi] and carries his name. Later he shifted his capital to Tiberias and later to Acre, from which he ruled the whole northern part of the country.

After Zahir al-Umar left 'Arrabi, it slipped back into insignificance, from which it started to re-emerge only after the beginning of the twentieth century.

According to the UN decision of 1947, to divide Palestine into an Arab and a Jewish state, 'Arrabi was supposed to belong to the Arab section. It was, however, occupied without war by Israel in 1948. (Kanaana 1976: 55–56)

Yet from the vantage point of the present day, this complex history is sometimes evoked as mythically Islamic or as mythically brotherly and religiously tolerant. For Palestinians in the Galilee now, the events of 1948 are not just another in a long series of events; from this vantage point 1948 seems like a watershed year, after which everything changed. My grandmother revered one of the small shrines in the center of the village as the shrine of a holy man. Today, having been “reclaimed” by religious Jews and surrounded by a locked fence to protect it from the people who a few years earlier had revered it, it is considered Jewish. I was never taught that Salama used to be a Druze village—Wadi Sallama today is a Bedouin village. While the information is somewhere in the history books, it is not on the minds of most people in my village. The Israeli school system never taught me about the Islamic era in Palestine, which lasted about 1,300 years; it tried to keep that out of my mind. And my Communist cousins taught me about the feudalism of that era as they knew of it, especially after the eighteenth century, reinserting it into history and making me look at it in a new way.

I present this autobiographical information to introduce myself to you as your guide through this book, but also as an illustration of how diverse and plural the Galilee is, and yet how certain patterns can run through it. The Galilee contains Muslims, Christians, Druze, and Jews, small villages, large cities, and Bedouin settlements, people that belong to different lineages and possess different amounts of wealth—all categories that people identify with at different moments. What are those moments and what are the structures that allow some categories to gain valence over others? In the Israeli state, one influence over the ways in
which people identify with these categories and places has been the decision to limit or not to limit the size of one’s family. That decision has become an important marker of identity, a crucial site for the negotiations and contestations of political, economic, and social boundaries. As Palestinians have become increasingly proletarianized, incorporated into a consumerist economy (usually at the bottom), and depicted by the state as an overfertile “problem population,” the number of babies one has becomes one of the main ways to trace power.

Chapter 3, “Fertile Differences,” demonstrates how classic modernization theory, which constructs the “Third World” as uncontrollably and irrationally overreproductive and thus poor, has infiltrated Palestinians’ thinking about self and other. The language of Third World population studies gets taken up by people in that world, so that many Palestinians accuse their supposedly more fecund neighbors of being “just like the Third World,” making no effort to control their reproduction. Other Palestinians reverse the argument and call the modernists selfish and materialistic. In either case, the differences in family size and contraceptive use have come to define one’s status.

WORKING THE FIELD

Much of this book is based on one year of fieldwork during which I lived with my parents in the Galilee in the room that I grew up in. Much of it is also informed by a longer experience of being from the Galilee. I do not say this to evoke the supposedly unquestionable legitimacy of a native anthropologist, but rather to say that I sometimes cannot point to the specific “data” or “sources” on which some of my claims are based. Some of my arguments are products of a combination of memory, nostalgia, intuition, personal attachments, and missing my husband in New York. I encourage you to read this personal history in my text.

As anthropologists have for so long claimed, the boundaries between formal research and the everyday are fuzzy. During my fieldwork months I engaged in formal research activities such as setting up formal interviews, visiting maternal and child health clinics, hiring a male research assistant, responding to an invitation to lecture to a women’s leadership group in a Druze village, discussing research methods with other women researchers in the area, attending a conference on women and violence in Haifa, and e-mailing back and forth with a sociologist in Belgium. But I also went to the mall with my cousins, attended
friends’ engagement parties and children’s birthday parties, helped my aunt with her gardening, watched music videos with my friends, went to congratulate a neighbor on the success of her in vitro fertilization. A visit to a Palestinian girlfriend who was studying at the university in Jerusalem and rented an apartment for a short period in a Jewish settlement or to my uncle who is a professor of anthropology at Birzeit University in the West Bank were not planned as part of my research agenda, but I went home with a writing pad full of notes. This blurred boundary between work and nonwork makes for a more holistic approach to my topic, but also for a feeling that I am overanalyzing everything—overzealous to see family planning everywhere I look. This too you may want to read in my text.

One of my best friends, ‘Arin, invited me to have lunch after her youngest brother’s first communion. The family joked about her brother’s altercations with the nuns and how he almost got kicked out of the preparatory class. ‘Arin said her parents don’t care about religion much, but they want her brother to be like his peers and not to feel left out. I was very interested in this conversation and asked so many questions that it was obvious that I was considering it as part of my research. The family didn’t seem to think this event was such a big deal, especially the boy himself. His family hadn’t invited anyone else to the lunch. ‘Arin said jokingly, “Rhoda is more interested in the communion than we are.”

While I did live in my parents’ home, I traveled beyond it in mind and body. Although I had originally conceived of my study as centered on one bounded location, as my work unfolded I found myself drawn beyond those boundaries. People in one location urged me to contact their friends and relatives in other areas. When I visited my cousin’s wife’s sister in ‘Arrabi to interview her, a sister-in-law who stopped by for coffee told me, “You should really interview women in my parents’ hometown, B’ayni. They have the highest birth rate in the world. My younger sister can take you around.”

People made babies in contexts not always confined to their immediate places of residence, and I was carried with the flow of these expanding and contracting contexts. When I did go to B’ayni, this village with the supposedly highest birth rate in the world, I dropped in on an old friend of mine, Salam.² Her mother-in-law came to borrow some yogurt culture when I was there, and she told me her husband had lived in the

² I have changed most names and a few personal details to protect the privacy of individuals.
city of Haifa for a long time and was so influenced by foreigners that he wanted her to have fewer children. This comment led me to call an old friend I knew from Communist Party summer camp, a Bedouin woman who went to Haifa University and had stayed on in Haifa as a journalist. She knew some of Salam’s father-in-law’s old neighbors in the city. But she also invited me to lunch at her parents’ house in her village, where I met her brother who had married a Russian woman. Reproductive politics in B‘ayni and Haifa were embedded in a larger context, in conceptions of urban and rural differences and notions of modernity and tradition. As I journeyed between places, I recognized them as important locales for the circulation of meaning and power, but also as places that were intricately linked to others.

While not “imprisoning the natives” (Appadurai 1988) in my arbitrary and narrow construction of place—a single neighborhood, village, or city—I have chosen to focus on the Galilee, a larger but nonetheless circumscribed region. Its boundaries are certainly porous, are often pushed and pulled in various directions, and overlap and are engulfed by other boundaries, but the Galilee is a dimension of space that is powerfully present in the minds and social interactions of people. It is a practice of location that I deploy along with many other Palestinians. The Galilee is an important locale for the circulation of meaning and power, for the formation and re-creation of identities.

Part of the “placing” of the Galilee, like so much else in Israel, thus has to do with boundaries, numbers, and religion. Palestinians who live inside the 1948 borders of Israel, unlike those living in the Occupied Territories, in new autonomous areas, or in the diaspora, are citizens of the state of Israel. Numbering around 23 percent of all Palestinians, they are largely descendants of the relatively few Palestinians who were not expelled from the emerging state of Israel during the 1948 war. Nearing one million people, these Palestinians today find themselves an ethnic minority of about 20 percent of Israel’s population. Half live in the northern region of the Galilee. Estimates of their concentration there range from 50 to 75 percent, depending on how the region’s boundaries are defined (Falah 1989: 232; Yiftachel 1995: 222). According to the government’s definitions, “non-Jews” were 51.4 percent of the 943,000 residents of the area in 1995 (Central Bureau of Statistics 1998). At stake in these numbers and borders is the character of the Galilee—pictures by Palestinians as their enclave and by the state and many Israeli Jews as a wild frontier to be settled and Judaized.
Palestinian Arabs in the Galilee largely refer to themselves as either Palestinians or Arabs. The choice of terms and their meaning have a history. The state of Israel has historically chosen not to use the term “Palestinian” because its use would imply recognition of Palestinians as a national group that has rights. Its preference is for “Arab,” which identifies these people with Arabs in other countries, whom they are welcome to go and join. Most Israelis also routinely speak of “Arabs” while conveniently overlooking “the fact that the term ‘Arabs’ silences the link which Palestinians have to the disputed homeland” (Rabinowitz 1997: 13). As Rebecca Stein notes, to translate “Palestinian” as “Arab” is to sanitize and rewrite a threatening history (1996: 103). Moreover, the Israeli preference for the term “Arab” to refer to Palestinian Arabs also conveniently erases the existence of other Arabs in the country—Arab Jews. These identity politics lie under the surface of such terms in the Galilee and should be kept in mind.

According to Israeli government data, Palestinians in the Galilee live in 73 localities—4 Arab cities, 69 Arab villages, and 3 “mixed” localities (Central Bureau of Statistics 1998). These localities are “approved by government planning institutions”; some 50 Arab villages with nearly 7,000 residents in all are unrecognized. Jews in the Galilee, with roughly the same population, live in 295 Jewish localities, a fact that reflects the patterns of both numerous small Jewish settlements, planned and placed strategically by the state to balance out and Judaize the Galilee, and the destruction and emptying of more than 100 Palestinian villages and towns in the 1940s.

I thus wove through these patterns in the Galilee and outside it, following the contexts in which people narrated their making of babies and culture. One of the important places to which people travel—in more ways than one—is “the West.” What is clear is that we are no longer dealing with an isolated location (and as the brief synopsis of ‘Arrabi’s history suggests, perhaps we never were), as the insertions of world development theory’s reproductive measure into the Galilee illustrates. People indeed describe themselves as trying to “follow in the path of

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3. When Nadim Rouhana asked a sample of Palestinian university students in Israel in 1989, “How would you define yourself?” 43.5% chose Palestinian in Israel, 25.7% Palestinian Arab, 10.6% Israeli Palestinian, 5.5% Palestinian Arab in Israel, 4.5% Palestinian, 4.1% Arab, 2.7% Israeli, 2.1% other, 1.4% Israeli Arab (Rouhana 1997: 122).

4. More on this history of land, population, and Judaization policy may be found in Chapter 1.
the First World,” or as taking a better route to get there. By having fewer children, many people hope to be able to provide them with recently conceived “necessities”: computers, Coca-Cola, Adidas, Swatches.

Chapter 2, “Luxurious Necessities,” explores emerging conceptions of “household economy” in a context of changing patterns of employment and the penetration of commodification. New requirements, needs, and desires have been created rapidly. Family planning thus becomes part of a consumerist strategy to provide more of these new “necessities” to a smaller number of children. This strategy is clearly linked to the increasing association of large families with poverty and “backwardness.” Thus in some ways, people make babies, families, and culture in a kind of global economic context writ local.

My riding of the ebb and flow of places of identification in the Galilee was both facilitated and circumscribed by my connections. I have more than fifty first cousins on my father’s side, most of whom are married and have children. Even my close family transcends the boundaries of my village—one of my uncles and one aunt live in Nazareth; another uncle lives in Ramallah, in the West Bank. Many of my female cousins have also married outside our village and have extensive networks of relatives and friends in the various places they have settled. I went to five schools (including two regional magnet schools) in three locales between kindergarten and twelfth grade and have stayed in touch with friends from each of them. My father is a well-known doctor and has numerous professional contacts. My mother has been a high school teacher in two villages for twenty years and knows students of several generations. All of these networks played important roles in my study. Everyone I interviewed had one or two degrees of separation from me via these networks. While these connections lubricated my interactions, usually allowing for some degree of familiarity and trust, I make no claims to having a representative sample. While I tried to choose people from a variety of backgrounds, I most often wound up meeting people whom folks already in my networks chose as suitable subjects for me.

One of my cousins, Samiyyi, asked me many questions about my research. When she heard about the number of women I had interviewed, she told me I should really be talking to more men because “this subject [family planning] is their decision, women only carry out the orders.” As far as I can tell, Samiyyi herself chose to continue having children until, after four boys, her fifth child was a girl, without any pressure from her husband. Yet she insisted on setting up an interview for me with a man she thought I would find “interesting” for my research.
Note that I do nonetheless have a considerable number of people from the Galilee whom I talked to and talk about, some of whom I was (or became) closer to than others. As will become clear, I chose not to follow the trend of taking a single person’s story, or three persons’ interactions with the participant-observer, as the basis for my analysis. There are many disadvantages and limitations in my choice. The individuality and life context of some of the men and women I introduce are diluted. My relatively brief introduction of a larger number of people of many backgrounds can more insidiously mask the fact that you are meeting them all through me.

Yet the alternate strategy of focusing on one person’s more comprehensively represented experiences creates parallel problems. The small number of subjects, though their individuality and specificity can come to life more vividly than those of a larger number, may in the end come to be seen as representative of an entire culture. Moreover, providing a life context for people’s opinions or decisions can serve as the basis for simplistic or reductionist “explanations” for them. When presented alone, the life context can emerge in relative isolation rather than in relation to other life contexts. Additionally, such in-depth accounts can potentially create a sense of intimacy and exhaustive knowledge that lends itself to easy closure, just as brief introductions and superficial descriptions of income level or religion can do.

My decision to cast the net more widely was a choice between alternatives that were both problematic. What eventually tipped my research and writing in the direction that it has taken here has to do with the constant encouragement, even prodding, that I received from people in the Galilee to interview and consider a large number of subjects. These demands were frequently embedded in basic positivist assumptions about research, problems, and solutions. While I certainly questioned these assumptions, my work is “tainted” by my methodological decisions.

To my advantage, my strategy allows for a great variety of opinions to emerge, and thus for a sense of openness that a few life histories might foreclose. At the same time, it permits me to highlight what I believe to be telling patterns within the variety and multiplicity—patterns that might not emerge from a single account. At its best, this polyvocal style

5. While rereading the revisions to this book, I occasionally lost sight of the people whose names I had changed. This experience made me realize my shortcomings in capturing the people I know.

6. Asad 1994 discusses the unacknowledged parallel between such anthropological narratives and case studies that are presented as typical.
traces important rhythms and systematics of power within the plurality, hybridity, and complexity of experiences.

Sometime in the middle of my year of fieldwork I realized that while I had many intimate relationships with women, which I felt gave me deep insight into my topic of research, I had few such relationships with men. When I talked to anyone except my close male cousins and friends, the conversations on family planning were awkward: either I was embarrassed or they were. I certainly did not have the same sense of ease and fluidity I felt with many women and girls. I was interviewing an acquaintance’s husband one day, and when I got to the question “Have you ever used contraceptives?” he looked away, called his sister to get us some coffee, and launched into a half-hour lecture on the many advances Arab women have made in the workplace. So I decided to hire a male research assistant, Manhal, an outspoken and sociable sociology student whose brother was engaged to a friend of mine. I am not sure how far this strategy was able to push the limitations of my being a woman, since all the men Manhal interviewed knew I would listen to the tapes or read the notes, but I did try to push them. Many of the quotes from men are doubly filtered—first through Manhal, then through me.

Obviously people’s perceptions of me and my research are an essential part of this project, not only because such perceptions influenced the things they told me, but also because they constantly tossed my questions back to me. Inasmuch as I had been married for three years and did not yet have any children, my going around asking people why and when they had babies was just begging for the questions to be turned back on me. Ethnographic attention was often focused on me. Although I had not planned to engage in this kind of reflexive dialogue so extensively and with so many people, I found myself doing so at their insistence. The fact that I had married an American (of Jewish and Christian background) fascinated many people, and the fact that I was still childless surprised many others. That detail, combined with the fact that I was living in my parents’ home for lengthy periods of time without my husband, led to suspicions of infertility and impending divorce. Many people I met immediately looked at my left hand to see whether I was still wearing my wedding ring. Once when I opened my wallet and our wedding photo fell out, an acquaintance remarked, “Oh, you’re still

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7. I will spare you the litany of instances in which I was interrogated during my research. I have incorporated the more interesting and (for me) telling instances in the body of the narrative.
network out of London, which probably would have seemed more impressive.

Yet the overall acceptance of my somewhat deviant behavior and of my research, despite occasional criticisms and disapprovals, again has to do with my father’s support of me, my elite education, my relative wealth (my nuclear family is probably upper middle class in the Galilee), and my connections with the United States.8 Again, these are venues for the exercise and circulation of power. My connections with the Chinese-American community, the support of my mother, and my feminism were probably not what legitimated me.

The fact that I was (or had been, according to some) married was also an advantage, to the extent that it made me privy to talk about sex and babies. Had I attempted this research a few years earlier, my supposedly virgin ears would probably have been protected from the many lewd jokes, explicit information, and tips on contraception that I heard.

Most of my fieldwork was conducted in colloquial Arabic with a variety of regional dialects, with some classical Arabic, Hebrew, and English words interjected, often to signal the speaker’s modernity or rejection of it.9 My translations of Arabic are another level of filtration you should read into my text. When I have felt unable to translate words ac-

8. Although the United States is often condemned in the Galilee as an imperialist power that has supported Israel consistently, it is also envied as a seat of cultural, economic, and technological power. Chapter 1 explores this matter further.

9. Colloquial dialects vary even within the Galilee. My transliterations follow local pronunciations, with a bias toward ‘Arrabi’s fallâḥî style. I also used colloquial versions of village and city names, thus eschewing both Israeli official names and classical ones. The system used for Arabic is based on the IJMES one, modified for local pronunciations. For Hebrew transliteration, the Library of Congress system was used.
accurately, I have transliterated them. Bear in mind that some of my transcriptions and translations are inadequate to portray the eloquence, wit, and playfulness of people’s words. My renditions occasionally lose some of the speakers’ original humor, persuasiveness, and significance. Moreover, the interpretive work and the academic vocabulary I use for my own analysis and theorizing may imply a simplistic and false contrast between the anthropologist who analyzes and theorizes and my subjects, “who merely relate experiences without having thought about them” (Rand 1995: 21). I attempt to quote many people as they analyze and theorize on the subject at hand, academically and otherwise, to dispel this false contrast.

But not only are these my translations of other people’s words, and not only are they words said in front of me (or my research assistant), they are momentary and contextual articulations and expressions. People may say other things at other moments, or do things contrary to what they say. (I certainly do.)

Although some people may appear passive vis-à-vis my role as writer, many of them are certainly not so in person. Late one evening when several relatives were visiting at my family’s house, someone mentioned that one of my cousins might be moving back from Jerusalem to the village with his wife and children. They commented that the wife, who is from Jerusalem, said she would have another child if they moved to the village because she would be an outsider and would want another son to empower her. My father looked over at me and said, “Isn’t that interesting, Rhoda?” One of my older female relatives got excited about this topic and wanted to tell us more. My dad asked me if I wanted to go and get my tape recorder, but I was tired and I said I could write it down later. My aunt said, “Pardon me, my dear, but do you think you can remember everything we say now tomorrow morning? I think it’s better if you go get your tape recorder.”

Even in the structured and hierarchical context of a lecture, the audience often talks back. I attended a lecture sponsored by the Communist Party’s women’s democratic movement in Sakhnin and given by my cousin’s husband, an American-trained doctor of clinical psychology. The lecture was attended by about fifty or so women of various ages, educational backgrounds, and degrees of religiosity (several women were wearing Islamicist dress). There were also about twenty men, mostly middle-aged party regulars. The lecture was on the role of fathers in forming children’s personalities. During the question-and-answer period, one man in the audience who said he had two wives and nine chil-
dren launched into his own extended lecture on the difficulty of any involvement of fathers in child raising because they are the main breadwinners. After ten minutes the women in the room started whispering, laughing, and finally talking loudly to drown him out. One woman shouted across the room, “You’re wrong, sit down!” When he finally did so, many women had questions for the lecturer. One woman paraphrased him liberally: “Yes, I agree that women sacrifice everything for their kids, not like men.” Another woman said his lecture was not very useful to those in the audience with older children, since “the general lines of a personality are formed in the first five years of life and then the circle is closed.” She then argued with the lecturer about Freudian theory. Indeed, academics and researchers, like nonprofessionals, are questioned and challenged in the Galilee, as I suspect this book will be.

That I was one of only two children in my family—a family whose decisions on the issue of family planning were visible and noticed—very likely encouraged some people to express agreement with my family’s choice. It had the opposite effect on my old campmate Suha; she pitied me: “I want more than just a boy and a girl. Rhoda, you have only one brother, so you know how it feels. Isn’t it horrible? My children need more sisters and brothers.” It did not prevent a friend’s grandmother from telling me, “This young generation of women are all whores. They just want to sit on their asses and eat grilled meat—they don’t want to bother with raising children.”

The point of this discussion is not to say flippantly that everything is contested. That the college-educated woman could engage the psychology lecturer in theoretical debate only emphasizes the power of these institutions and forms of knowledge. That the women in the audience demanded that their husbands assume some responsibility for child raising by glorifying their roles as sacrificing mothers emphasizes that resistance often partakes of the power of the dominant. That Suha felt sorry for me because I had only one male sibling emphasizes a gendered structure of power, and that my friend’s grandmother criticized young women’s reproductive decisions by questioning their sexual morality and commitment to the family highlights the power of those elements in society. Indeed, contestation and resistance often draw on other forms of domination. It has become a truism that resistance mimics power. And indeed, Palestinian resistance to Israeli population policy, which encourages Jews to have more children and Palestinians to have fewer, continues to locate the site of political contest in women’s wombs. Thus Palestinians have advocated either having larger families (to outbreed Jews,
just as the Israelis fear) or smaller families (in order to afford to modernize them and thus to challenge Israeli domination with the quality of their children rather than the quantity). But in both resistance strategies and in Israeli population policy, reproduction and nationalism continue to be tightly paired.

However, to say that power meets resistance but that resistance mimics power is not to throw one’s hands in the air in the face of hegemony—the specific consequences must be analyzed and evaluated as particular and contingent. Resistance reconfigures power along a variegated scale. In the case of population politics in the Galilee, one of the consequences has been the alienation of Palestinian women from the main source of family planning services available to them, government-sponsored clinics. This consequence can be evaluated in terms of the negative impact on these women’s health. Thus “resistance-mimics-power” analyses can remain politically engaged.

My subjects were accustomed to researchers conducting studies in their communities. A large number of Palestinian academics have circulated there before me. In my immediate family, my uncle and one cousin are professors of anthropology, so I am entering well-charted waters. I draw on and owe much to their work. Yet the open-ended and unstructured style of anthropology is not held in wide esteem in the Galilee. “Where is your survey questionnaire?” I was constantly asked. “We’d love to see your data results when they’re complete.” “Scientific” research methods have gained ascendancy in the Galilee.

Part and parcel of this ascendancy of science is the increasing medicalization of bodies, in addition to their commodification. Significantly, these modernization processes are perceived as having altered the very state of gender and the body. In fact, these changes are often constructed as the primary features of modernization, resulting in new conceptualizations of reproduction and sexuality. Chapter 4 examines some of these bodily interventions in the Galilee, from the sale of cosmetics to IUDs to in vitro fertilization, as rich grounds for the exploration of the class, nationalist, and gender components of childbearing. Walk with me through malls, private clinics, newspaper editorials, sex education classes, and advertisements for plastic surgery as I explore these innovations and their involvement in the power plays of identity and reproduction. The modernization of the body in the Galilee has involved a new training of sexuality through particular forms of consumption, sex education, and the medical control of reproduction. I examine the various forms of contraception and new reproductive technologies, includ-
ing assisted conception, that have been introduced and the resulting power dynamics.

As I conducted this research, I sometimes felt I was imposing on people by demanding their time and energy, but many people seemed to really enjoy talking about these topics. Among the most enthusiastic were Iftikar and Buthaina. Iftikar was my classmate from the fifth to eighth grades, and I had fallen out of touch with her until I ran into her on the street one day. She was excited to see me because she was getting engaged to a man whose sister was a relative of mine by marriage. Iftikar invited me to her birthday party, which was attended by her current and former coworkers at an egg-sorting factory; Buthaina was her best friend from the factory. Their boss was a Palestinian subcontractor for the kibbutz that owned the business. During the next couple of visits back and forth, Iftikar and Buthaina asked me about my work, and eventually I interviewed them. As my questions built from “What would be your ideal family size?” to “Why do so many women prefer having boys?” to “Would you ever consider accepting donated sperm if you were infertile?” they became increasingly animated. They talked to me for hours. When I met with them again a couple of weeks later, one of their sisters and a friend were present, and Iftikar and Buthaina urged me to interview them. I didn’t have my notebook with me, so I forgot some of the questions I had asked Iftikar and Buthaina earlier, but no matter—they reminded me of the things I forgot to ask. They sometimes paraphrased my questions in much more elegant terms than I had used. I borrowed a piece of paper to write notes, and Buthaina asked me, “Are you really going to use this paper? I hope you don’t lose it or throw it away. These are important things.” Another friend of mine insisted that I interview her sister because she thought it would help me at the same time that it would help her sister “to get to talk about some of these things, to get it off her chest.” Obviously not everyone was as excited as these women were, but my continued interest in these topics is sustained by the enthusiasm with which my research was met. Issues of family planning are of deep interest to me but also to many Palestinians in the Galilee.

Some people I interviewed expected something back from me. Abu Riad, who helped women conceive boys with a “scientific” formula, wanted me to take his picture and show him “his section” of the book once it was done. My friend Salam, who helped me make many contacts in her village, wanted to talk to my father, who is a physician, to find out whether he had heard of a scientific formula to conceive male chil-
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dren. My father said that as far as he knew, no such thing existed. When
Salam called a few days later, she mentioned that she had finally found
a doctor who did know. In fact, when I asked people if they had heard
of such methods for conceiving boys, many of them asked me if I knew
of a way. Khaldiyyi said: “I don’t know how they do it, but yes, I have
heard of it. Do you know, Rhoda, how they do it, so we can tell my
daughter about it?” Khaldiyyi’s daughter, who had three daughters,
joined the conversation: “Yes, I hear all the teachers talking about this
at work. They even say there are hormones that you can buy at the phar-
mony.” Khaldiyyi added: “They used to tell me when you sleep with
your husband, sleep on the right side and you’ll conceive a boy, but it’s
not true. Tell us, is there a new way to do it?” My answer—that as far
as I knew, there was no proven way to determine the sex of a baby short
of medically assisted conception—was not what they wanted to hear.

Some of the information people expected from me I could provide. A
social worker who was thinking of getting her master’s degree, for in-
stance, wanted to know how to go about getting a scholarship to study
abroad. Other implicit expectations were well beyond my limited abili-
ties. A former schoolmate confided during an interview that even though
she had been married for six years and had two children, she still felt in-
credible pain every time she and her husband had intercourse. My lack
of expertise in such matters was a source of frustration to me as well as
to her. I told my friend to ask her gynecologist; she had already done so.
I asked her whether her husband rushed her too much and whether he
was gentle; she said, “It’s not him at all—he’s great. It’s me.” I bought
her lubricant jelly, but she said, “Rhoda, I can use this for now, but I
can’t use it all my life. It’s been six years.” She told me that I was the only
soul she had ever told this to except her husband and the doctor, and
there I was, unable to help. Safa’ Tamish, a sex educator, expressed the
same frustration when she was unable to help people with their prob-
lems. She gives sex education workshops and at the end many people ap-
proach her and confide in her about their own or their friends’ prob-
lems—but unlike me, she is planning to go back to school to train as a
sex therapist. Her plans are part of the process of modernizing the body,
which people perceive as both beneficial and warping.

Finally, part of the connections between the local and the global is the
position of the Galilee as my text about it circulates beyond its bound-
aries. When my husband read a draft of this introduction, he warned me
that exotic-sounding details such as Salam’s mother-in-law stopping
by to borrow yogurt culture might lend themselves to Orientalism. I
contemplated cutting these references, and especially deleting paragraphs on clan politics and wife beatings, which could be seen to confirm stereotypes of Palestinian culture. Generally I resisted this urge to censor, because silence would constitute a type of recapitulation. Moreover, I was not the only one to consider the possibility of playing into Orientalist biases. It has influenced many performances of culture and identity in the Galilee, including the ones performed for the sake of my research.

People were aware that my narrative about them would eventually travel in global circuits—circuits that have not been too kind to them. People’s accounts were already products of their own interpretations, not raw data waiting to be interpreted by me, and these interpretations often took into account the ramifications of this global travel. It seems hardly necessary to point to the fact that subjects themselves act as editors, cultural critics, theorists, and text makers, often self-consciously so, who calculate the dangers of Orientalism (Rand 1995: 17). I mentioned to a close family friend, Abu Mursi, some of the practices women told me they use (in addition to biomedical ones) to heal and protect their children, such as guarding them from the evil eye. He was only half joking when he replied, “I hope you’re not going to take these silly things with you and tell the Americans about them. That’s not what you’re doing, is it?” But Abu Mursi’s characterization of these things as silly, as well as the Western conceptualization of such practices as superstitions, is precisely what I am trying to address. These biases are built into the way such practices are deployed.

Many parents in the Galilee prefer to have more sons than daughters, but their constructions of their preference are clearly informed by the negative impression it may make at home and abroad. That is why it is often constructed in specifically “modern” and global terms. “All cultures like boys because they are patrilineal—it is only logical to want male heirs,” one woman told me. Locating this desire within modern nationalism, a narrative that is widely accepted globally (although Palestinian nationalism is often not), is another option. The emergence of “scientific” methods for conceiving boys has made for the possibility of rationally planning a small family (with boys); that is certainly a modern desire. Logic, nationalism, and science are used today to construct a preference for sons.

While this work focuses on the Galilee, it certainly has some relevance to family planning in other areas in which Palestinians live, as well as to the dynamics of reproduction in other societies. Indeed, I suggest
that my analyses may offer an approach useful in the study of other societies and may provide an important angle from which to view life beyond the Galilee.

I hope to illuminate some of the cohesive forms of political, economic, and social structures in which family planning has emerged as a central category of distinction, domination, and contestation in the Galilee. Modernization has inserted itself in profound ways. Nationalism, economic transformations, medical regulation, new forms of social stratification, and changing gender relations have strikingly been articulated through discourses and practices of reproduction. This process encompasses many nuances, individual variations, internal inconsistencies, and exceptions. But a distinct pattern of “modern” over “backward” emerges, the (negative and positive) consequences of which are strongly felt in the Galilee. Reproduction has been politicized and maternity nationalized. Women’s bodies are deeply inscribed as reproducers of the nation, whether by bearing few or many children. Family planning has become an essential new household economic strategy. The economization of family planning has emerged as both a set of practices of material acquisitiveness and a salient belief system. Development theory, with its binaries of modern and primitive, controlled and uncontrolled reproduction, has come to resonate strongly in the Galilee. Social categorizations of urban/rural/Bedouin and of clan and religion gain new valence through new conceptions of reproductive difference. The ideal production of small, spaced, controlled, nuclearized, consuming, gender-balanced families has become an important means of contesting and negotiating shifting categories of personhood and community. Medicalization and scientific innovations have not only transformed reproductive behavior but also influenced social values. Finally, shifting gender relations are manifest in changing expressions and practices of family planning. Preferences for giving birth to boys rather than girls are being constructed as compatible with modernity.

It is striking how powerfully modernization has transformed the lives of Palestinians in the Galilee. Arguments for and against modernization define, shape, and limit the debates on gender, nation, class, and religion. These transformations have not affected all Palestinians equally or in the same way, but no Palestinian can ignore them. Planning a family (whether small or large) is today a point at which Palestinians can engage, emulate, contest, and challenge ethnic politics, economic transformations, medical interventions, and social organization—all changes that they cannot afford to ignore.