

Defying Conventional Perception: Nabulsi Women in Palestinian Anti-Colonial Resistance

Rabab Abd Al Hadi

..Rabab Ibrahim Abdulhadi, PhD

.Associate Professor of Ethnic Studies

College of Ethnic Studies San Francisco State University

Feminist Studies canonical literature assumes that most Palestinian women, not unlike other women in Arab and Muslim communities, adhere to “traditional gender roles” as a result of an overly “patriarchal society” even if they play political and public roles. Palestinian Women’s Studies has long parted ways with these canonical assumptions. However, when Nablus is mentioned, the old Orientalist and conventional image re-emerges, namely that of a town that is insular, highly conventional, and “socially backward.” Nablus women, in particular, are imagined as excelling in cooking, home-making, gossip, and socializing-in other words, playing “traditional gender roles” in men-headed households and a highly patriarchal social setting. By contrast, women from other Palestinian areas are imagined as “modern, educated, outgoing and pioneering of social progress” in comparison with Nabulsi women.

Tracing the place, discourses and actions of Nabulsi women in different historical periods of Palestinian resistance to Zionist settler colonialism, and drawing on 20 years of participant-observation in Nablus and elsewhere in Palestine (as well as amongst other Palestinian communities in various diasporas), this paper argues against prevailing perceptions of Nabulsi women and conceptually offers an alternative framework for analyzing women’s roles and gender relations in Palestinian society.